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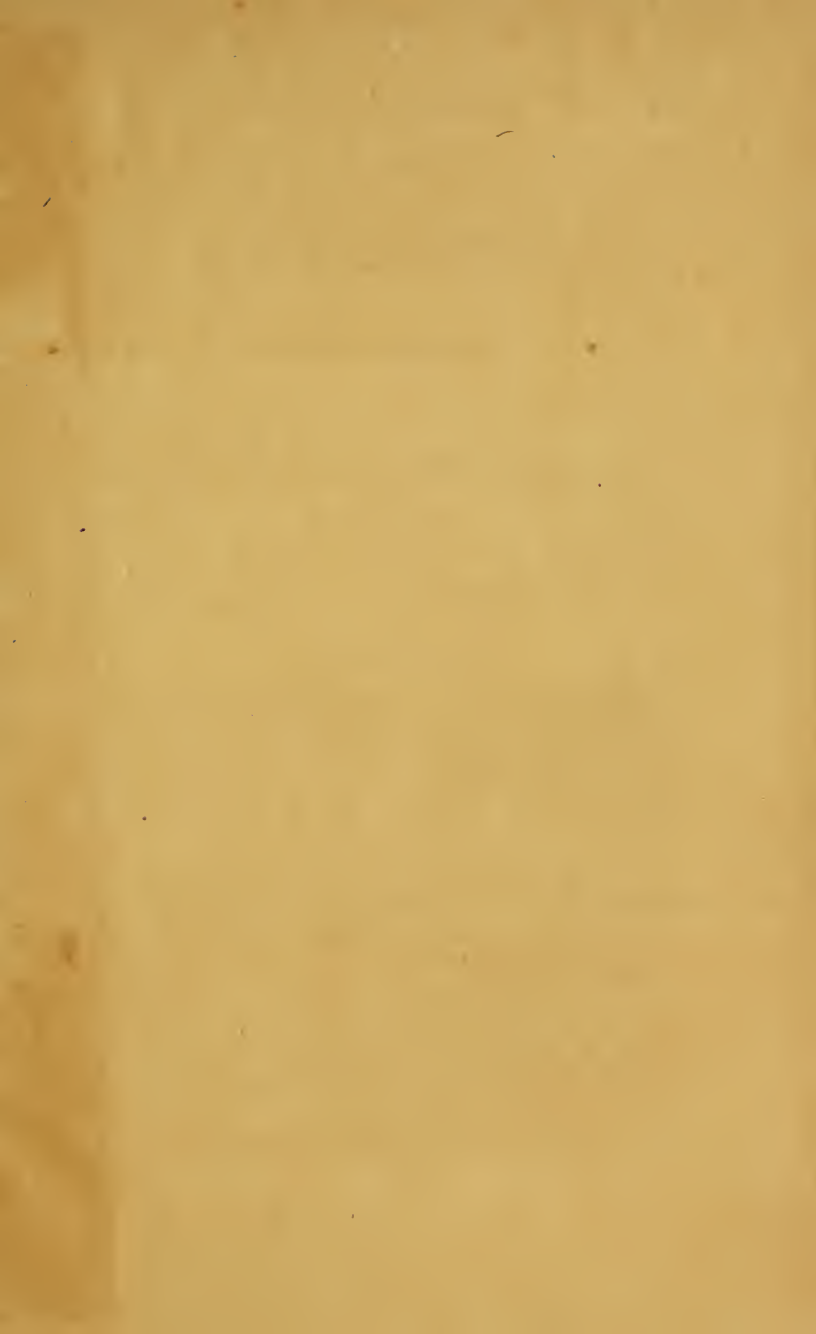
PRINCETON, N. J.

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# SERMONS,

BY

ALEXANDER HAMILTON VINTON,

*Rector of St. Paul's Church, Boston.*

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TO THE PARISHIONERS  
OF  
ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, BOSTON.

AMONG WHOM I HAVE GONE PREACHING THE GOSPEL  
FOR THIRTEEN YEARS,  
SOME OF WHOM ARE PRECIOUS TO ME AS SEALS OF MY MINISTRY,  
MANY ENDEARED BY THE SYMPATHY OF JOY AND SORROW,  
AND ALL BELOVED IN THE LORD,

I DEDICATE  
THIS VOLUME, IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THEIR MANY KINDNESSES  
TO ME, AND IN TESTIMONY OF  
THE LOVE AND CONSTANT AFFECTION WITH WHICH  
I AM FAITHFULLY,  
THEIR FRIEND AND PASTOR,  
ALEXANDER H. VINTON.

*Boston, Sept. 3, 1855.*



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## P R E F A C E .

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IN sending these sermons to the press, I feel that an act that seems so bold, and yet so voluntary, may require explanation.

For this I can only say, that the responsibility is as little my own, as can well be supposed; and had the publication waited for my wishes, I should hardly have attempted this experiment of authorship.

But when the suggestion came from one whose ripe Christian scholarship I had been accustomed to respect; who was aiming, in his line, to advance a distinct sort of Christian literature; consecrating his press, as once his tongue, and his pen, to preaching the everlasting Gospel—I felt that I had hardly the liberty of refusing.

And since he was willing to incur the whole risk of profit or loss, he will, no doubt, accept the accompanying responsibility of praise or blame.

In selecting the sermons, I have studied such diversity as I supposed might make them more generally useful; and such as they are, I commend them prayerfully to that blessed Spirit, whose mission it is, to take of the things of God, and show them to men; and who can preach no less effectually through the eye, than through the ear, to reach the heart, and save the soul.

## SERMON I.

---

### THE SINFULNESS OF SIN.

---

Romans vii. 13.

“THAT SIN BY THE COMMANDMENT MIGHT BECOME EXCEEDING  
SINFUL.”

THE meaning of these words is, that the demerit and evil of sin are most plainly revealed by the law of God.

In general, however, men are apt to form their judgments on this subject by quite another standard. It is unquestionably true that society does not always decide upon moral questions as God himself does. Society sometimes calls evil good and good evil, considering rather the well-being of the community than the mind of God. And, in a very artificial state of society, right and wrong are apt to be resolved into merely proper and improper.

But if we would be saved by God, we must be saved in his own way. To act as he would have us do, we must first understand as he

would have us understand, must see with his eyes, must judge of moral relations with his judgment, must place ourselves in his light, when, as the Prophet says, "we shall see light."

The law of God is his image, the copy and expression of his character; for it is the decree of his will, which is but the acting out of his whole nature. Sin, being the transgression of the law, is best seen in its true nature by the light of the law, and by the law it is seen in all its various points of view to be exceedingly sinful.

As sin is the transgression of the law, we may regard its nature, first, as an abstract thing, as a violation of law in general. Every thing which is essentially bad is the violation of some sort of law. And I do not know but the converse is equally true—that the violation of any law is essentially evil. The whole system of the universe, above and below, is a system of order and consequently of law, because law is only the rule of order.

Not only is the life and action of each sort of thing regulated by law, but the connection of different things is sustained by the same pervading power of law.

The adaptation of one thing to another, and of all to the universe in which they live, is still by



virtue of the same great principle. So that law is only the theory of the universe, the plan of the world's perpetual movement, the harmony of creation, murmuring forth in the under-tones of nature's easiest movements, or pealing in the crash of her more terrible energies. The silent play of affinities or their convulsive rush, the minuter as well as the mightier, are all produced by law, sitting like a queen, whose word is power and whose throne is the world.

When all the interlacing laws of the world are allowed to act unhindered, the harmony of things is complete, and nature's movements, and man's deeds, the thoughts of the mind, the affections of the heart, the actings of life and business, are like one texture whose warp and woof are proportioned and strong, which is studded with graceful figures and colored with a due diversity. But any violation of law is a rent in the texture, a discord in the chorus, an insurrection in the grand army of God's forces. The theory of the universe is disturbed and distorted, and no man can say whether the very life of the world will not be shortened by it.

Now this transgression of law is always produced by one set of agencies interfering with another set, when the laws of one department shoot beyond their limits into another. If the

moral goes over into the physical or the physical trenches upon the moral, if the feelings thwart the judgment, and the human propensities disregard the laws of nature or of conscience, then there is a transgression, there is evil done, and somebody or something will feel it. Nature, or the law of nature, is impatient at the contempt of her authority, and indicates her majesty by retribution. Let us look at some of these transgressions of law, and see how their evil is exhibited in their consequences.

Let a man's nerves be overtaxed by excitement or labour, his whole conscious being will have to pay the forfeit in suffering or in helplessness. Let the flow of his blood be unequal or interrupted, and his whole frame succumbs and his life goes out. Let his ambition incite him to too much effort, and he breaks down altogether. Let his propensities seize the reins of his life, and he burns out. Let intemperance get the mastery of reason, and reason, dethroned, will go out from him, and leave him a poor, staring idiot. These are common instances of violated law, in which the human will goes contrary to nature, and nature takes her sure revenge. They are extreme cases, and they show the more clearly the finished consequences of such transgression. In proportion as the offence comes near to this,

in the same proportion are its effects mischievous, and even in the slightest degree, therefore, the transgression is bad, bad in its consequences, and so we must suppose essentially bad.

But let us take another analogous case more striking, and, if not an actual, yet a conceivable case.

This universe is bound together by one great principle or law, which is not only the band that girdles the world, but the vital power that penetrates its frame, and holds each atom to its neighbour atom. It is the great law of attraction, as we call it.

It is conceivable, I say, that this law might be thwarted, or suspended, or overpowered by some counter influence. There is reason to suppose that, in some remarkable cases, this has been the fact. If such a thing should occur to-day on any large scale, you can see what an overwhelming mischief would befall the system. Each whirling orb would rush through the unlimited void without aim or order. Each in its separate projection would follow its own separate career, until, in the absence of light and warmth, each world would starve alone in the empty unknown space, and all its living things would die. Nay, that world would itself no longer remain to furnish graves for its dead inhabitants. For the same

law broken would dissolve the cohesion of the earth and air. The solid structure of each globe would itself fly asunder in atoms. Its elements would take their first impalpable form, in which no eye could see, and no grasp retain them, but His who first consolidated them into a universe. Dark, lifeless and unknown, the spreading space would be the world's big tomb, from which there could be no resurrection, and not a creature survive to whisper the catastrophe.

It is not impossible that some such thing may be. It would be so to-day, if the great natural law should be suspended for a while.

Now I wish you to contemplate this mighty disaster, in order to realize the evil of breaking Divine laws. It is true that you and I cannot do this mischief on so large a scale, but the instance proves just as much as if we could. And now, if we have appreciated this analogy as we ought, let us turn to our direct subject.

There is another law of God, as much above this law of nature as God's moral attributes are superior to his natural. That law was meant for men, thinking moral agents. It is brought as near to us as the law of nature itself. It is more indispensable to our peace than that; and although all the united wills of men cannot supersede it, since no conspiracy of wickedness can dethrone

the Almighty, yet any single creature can throw contempt upon it by resisting it, and so far as he does so, he does what he can, not to destroy the universe indeed, but to demoralize it, which is far worse. . Far worse, I say, because the moral law was meant for eternity, the natural law for time. The one is for the body, the other for the soul. The latter is for earth, and men, and brutes; the former is for Heaven, and Angels, and God himself.

Now, although the bad consequences of an action may prove that the action was wrong, yet our view of those consequences does not always measure the wrong done. An action that is essentially wicked is just as wicked without any evil consequences that we can perceive, as if we could trace out the whole line of mischief. Its tendencies are just as bad, as if they were carried to their direct result. Remember, then, what the law is of which we speak, and you will see the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

It is God's choicest institution, the transcript of his whole mind and heart. His moral government will be everlastingly conducted by the dictates of that law. Heaven and earth shall pass away, and, with them, all other laws beside, but not a jot or tittle of this law of laws shall fail.

In this law God comes near to us, and declares

his will. In every moral action, man likewise declares his will. If his will be adverse to God's, this is disobedience—sin. God says to man, "*Thou shalt,*" the sinner says in reply, "*I will not;*" or God again declares, "*Thou shalt not,*" the sinner replies again, "*I will.*" The opposition is direct. It is a simple conflict of wills. If man were the stronger he would enforce his own will, and this would be to dethrone the Lord. But it does not alter the wrong that he is the weaker of the two. It exposes the *folly* of his sin, but it does not detract from its wickedness. Its tendency is just the same as if it were successful. If he should succeed, he would carry devastation into heaven itself. Imbecility, folly and selfishness on the throne would turn the universe into an all-devouring pit of woe. But is the sin any less sinful because it only tries to do all this and cannot? It is deliberate sin just as much. It is selfish just as much. It is a struggle for power with God Almighty, in the very matter where his chiefest honour is concerned, and the welfare of the universe most vitally involved.

If such conduct be not the very perfection of moral propriety, it is plain it must be exceedingly sinful. As opposition to law, and that the highest law, it must be, if not a matter of world-wide commendation, then a thing of damning infamy.

We can understand, then, the force of the language of the text. Even when we look at sin as the transgression of law in its abstract sense, it is essentially and only wrong, exceedingly wrong.

Now, again, let us observe more in detail, how the moral law shows the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

Since the law is the portrait of the Divine character, and every disobedience is a personal offence against God, we can see its sinfulness by the attributes which it provokes.

First, every sin is a direct challenge of omnipotence. I am not going to attempt the description of this attribute. Human language was not made for such an undertaking. The power of God is an idea which no finite conception ever compassed. We could only describe it by negations. We should have to fix in our minds certain definite bounds as far as our minds can leap, and then say, "Greater than this." We should have to multiply that distance manifold, until the tired mind gasped for thought, and still we must say, "Vaster than this."

Who, by searching, can find out God? What imagination, travelling to the outmost limit of manifested power, can overleap the mighty chasm that still separates it from him in whose bosom is power's infinite source.

We are in the habit of estimating omnipotence by its creations. We travel to the sun and then to other suns. We map out all the known systems and lay them before our eyes, that we may seem to take them in at a glance; and when we have surveyed the whole star-peopled realm, we know not but there may be, for we feel there can be, just as deep an abyss filled with just such myriads of worlds; and then another, and another, until we can go no further from very faintness; and then we stop while infinitude pregnant with power still stretches out of sight. We have seen enough to know that He who made everything can do anything. This is only the shadow of his deeds, the hiding of his power. All this God made and upholds, and what is a more striking thought, he can destroy it all, and turn the limitless creation into a void solitude all black, and deep, and dead, with no fixed point but his own throne, and no living thing but himself. His very breath has that power as when you blow out the light of a candle. The motion of his finger sends out a stream of omnipotence that can turn everything to nothing. This is the power that stands behind the law and upholds it.

And where is the power that defies it? Turn your eyes downward—away, far away to that little speck of creation that moves round in its



tiny orbit. Narrow your vision more and more closely. There upon that little telescopic body, you see a little microscopic thing—a creature of yesterday, to die to-morrow. His breath is in his nostrils. He is crushed before the moth. You see him carry his head high, and cast a scornful look up towards the great law. God has told him, “Thou shalt not;” he grows angry and says, “I will.” God thunders again in his almightiness and says, “Thou shalt be destroyed;” the little creature is offended at the threat and will hear no more.

The sinfulness of sin is seen again in the wisdom it contemns.

The Divine wisdom is the power of knowing all that is possible as well as all that is actual. Before the mind of God all the causes of things are arranged like seeds for the nursery of the universe, and he knows what each will bring forth. He can tell all that has been in the history of eternity, and unfold everything that shall be or can be in the unopened future.

He can equally well understand the relations of things. He knows the effect of every possible combination of causes. He can foil every wrong design, can insure every right purpose, disappoint all machinations, bring good out of evil; and with matchless, amazing skill, can

make the wrath of man to praise him. This is the wisdom of omniscience.

To sin against the law is to despise it. And now, who is the sinner? The same inferior creature whom we saw just now, small in his understanding as in his power; one who knows but little of the past, nothing of the future, and scarcely more than the outside of himself; one whose wisdom is praised by men, if perchance he learns before he dies, that he knows nothing as he ought to know it; so that his rarest wisdom is his conscious ignorance. It is he, who, in spite of the infinitely wise law, will make his own laws; when omniscience points the path to glory and felicity, will choose another path; when the infallible mind utters through the law, "This is the way, walk ye in it," replies by the language of his life, "I will not, I desire not the knowledge of thy ways."

We may learn, again, the inveteracy of sin through the holiness of the law, reflecting the character of the Lawgiver. There is no attribute of God, which he himself so much exalts as his holiness. It is not itself so much an attribute as it is the brightness which is thrown over all the rest. It is the complexion of his character rather than one of its features. It consists of that immaculateness which makes the Deity seem to be all

light and purity; the quality which makes it necessary for him, if I may speak so, to prefer right to wrong, good to evil, truth to falsehood, charity to selfishness. It is this which creates in his bosom his irreconcilable hatred to all sin, so that sin is to his mind an eternal abomination. It is this which is the theme of the angels' loftiest adoration, upon which they look with most awe-stricken reverence, in whose presence they veil their faces with their wings, as they sing, in sublime chorus, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!" It is this, whose remembrance strikes down lust and pride in the heart of the penitent sinner, and makes him pant after those attainments in piety which will render him more like his God. And this it is, which the impenitent sinner most strenuously dislikes. It is uncongenial to his nature. If you speak of simple love, he can appreciate its sweetness; but if you call it *holy* love instead, there is an aversion of his feelings which he does not care to disguise; and when the law, the perfect law, radiant with God's holiness, shines upon him, he turns away as if its purity were intolerable and scathed his sight.

Thus far we have seen the evil of sin by the light of those Divine attributes, every one of which speaks out in the precept of the broken law. Let the law be still our schoolmaster, and

teach us, by its terrible penalties, the same solemn lesson of wisdom. Remember, then, the sentence passed upon the transgression of our first parent, of death, temporal and eternal.

From this sentence, we learn that sin planted the seed of causes and influences that should entail the certainty of temporal and immortal sorrow.

Mark, first, the temporal woe.

Go, stand in the midst of Paradise before the first sin. Range in its paths of beauty; rest in its bowers of peace; breathe in its atmosphere, whose every breath imparts the keener sense of life and the joy of immortality. Then stand with the banished Adam after that sin, outside the walls of Eden, its gates shut and guarded, his back forever turned to the lost Paradise and his face towards a world cursed for his sake. And when you have contemplated the vision of darkness, storm, and terror long enough, as it stretches in perspective to the end of time—then travel down through the days and years of actual history. Summon together the dead from every clime and region, from hill and dell, and bloody field, and ocean caves, till the earth itself shall seem to be but one huge cemetery, and this witness of death shall yet speak of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Gather together the

human tears that have flowed through the channels of human suffering, till its ocean banks are full, and its moaning tide, as it swells up to your feet, tells of the sinfulness of sin. Let the groans of man's wretchedness join in one long volumed peal of woe, and the burden of its dirge note is "sin." Find out the lurking places of want and pain, on palace floors or in caves of the wilderness, and every where sin has been before you, and left its foot-prints side by side with man's.

Next pass from the temporal penalty of the law to the eternal, whose terrible peculiarity is, that it works the grand forfeiture of all for which man was made. He was made for God, and for a home of such delights as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered the heart of man. And this is lost and gone, and his eternity is worse in nothing than in this, that he is away from God and without God; a condition out of which nothing can come forth but burning pangs, and weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Let this suffice for the personal penalty of sin, and its sinfulness as shown by that penalty.

And now turn to see how the evil of sin is attested by the law, in visiting its penalty upon the soul of our great substitute. For it was sin that procured all the sorrows of the crucified Em-

manuel. Sin drew him from Heaven, and separated the loving Father and the beloved Son. Sin compelled the mighty humiliation from the throne to the stable. Sin paved his way through life, and dogged him at every step. Sin made him the man of sorrows, an outcast in his own world, hated by those he loved. Sin smote him with the amazement of his bleeding agony in Gethsemane. Sin wove the royal robe of his contempt, and platted the sharp crown of his down-trodden majesty. Sin gave the buffet, mixed the gall, drove the nail, pointed the spear. Sin groaned in the lamentable appeal, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And sin gave its last groan of expiring vengeance, when He, who bore the mighty load for a world of sinners, for you and me, dropped his head upon his breast, and cried, "It is finished;" and the earth and the heavens echoed that groan, that one so innocent should be treated as so guilty.

It was the law's retribution that could not but be fulfilled. It was the awful vindication of power, wisdom and holiness all Divine, speaking and acting in the broken law. If that law can illustrate the exceeding sinfulness of sin, it is when it pours its indignation upon the unoffending head of the self-humbled God who made the law.

When we see it all, and remember that even

one sin, in its essential nature, is so evil that it cannot be pardoned without the blood of that agony, and then remember our own sins without recollection or number—sins of days, months, years—of a whole unrepented and unforgiven life, what a swollen aggregate of guilt! How should we stand convicted before conscience, as she rises up in each one of us and says, “For thee, for thee!” Yes, for thee; and the very fact, that we live to listen to such an appeal, illustrates afresh the divinity of the law and the baseness of its transgression. For it is the divinity of patience, forbearance and love that makes that appeal, that holds back the law and waits for us to reach the cross. It has been a long-suffering law to each one of us. Does not the suggestion stir your recollections to a turmoil, each one striving for the pre-eminence of sadness in your heart? How much defiance of God’s power—how much contempt of his wisdom—how much aversion from his purity, has his law witnessed in us all! In thought, and word, and deed—by the neglect of warnings—by the scorning of threats—by the despising of invitations—by the abuse of providences, the perversion of prosperity, and the hardening of the heart against affliction—by the resistance of the Spirit, and by the rejection of Christ, the bleeding Lamb of atonement—how

have we fearfully provoked it! On our sick beds, how often have we resolved and promised to give our restored powers to God and have not done it! When touched by an admonition, awakened by a sermon, impelled by the gentle striving of the Spirit, or induced by the view of a dying Redeemer, how often have we prayed and forthwith sinned against our prayer!

In all these ways God has waited and been with us to save us!

So assiduous is his love, and his beseechings so importunate, it may be that some of us are over wearied with his long-suffering, though he is not. There may be persons to whom this tenderness has lost its charm, and who, if their hearts could speak, would rather beg that God would trouble them no more. It is a sad abuse of grace, but it exposes, at least, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, as it is seen by the patience of the law.

And it is still a patient law. The retribution waits, and while it waits any of us may be saved. May we all have grace to understand the sinfulness of our sins and seek for mercy! All, I say, for "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." To you, to me, to all of us, the Spirit of truth, standing among us here, may say, with truthful emphasis, "Thou art the man."



## SERMON II.

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### SOVEREIGNTY AND FREEDOM.

---

Psalm cx. 3.

“THY PEOPLE SHALL BE WILLING IN THE DAY OF THY POWER,  
IN THE BEAUTIES OF HOLINESS FROM THE WOMB OF THE  
MORNING: THOU HAST THE DEW OF THY YOUTH.”

IN the whole strain of this Psalm, we have a prophetic view of the character and offices of the Christ to come. We see Him in the humiliation of his priestly character, stooping down, like a worn and thirsty traveller, to drink of the brook in the way. We see Him, as if refreshed by that stooping, lifting up his head in the dignity of an office, which, like that of Melchisedek, was both priestly and royal; and which, like Melchisedek's, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, made him a king and a priest *forever*.

It is in this character of royalty that he is presented to us in the third verse of the Psalm which is our text. The Psalmist foretells the triumphs of that grace which the enthroned

Saviour shall dispense in the world to gather to himself the great sacramental host of His redeemed. The number of those who shall be converted to His dominion, is signified by the poetical but most intricate expression, "from the womb of the morning, thou hast the dew of thy youth."

The best explanation I can give of this highly figurative passage is this, viz:—the phrase "the womb of the morning" signifies the depth from which the light comes forth. "Dew" is an image of both multitude and beauty, and "youth" is significant of the vigor of that early period of life—i. e., as the innumerable drops glistening on rock and leaf and grassy spire are revealed by the opening day, so shall be thy countless converts when thy grace shall go forth like the vigor of youth, or the flooding energy of the sun's first light. Some, indeed, interpret this figure as denoting that the splendor of the Redeemer's victory will be seen most remarkably in the great number of the young who shall be converted to His grace. But, in the explanation I have given, I see no violence to the passage, while for reasons both theological and rhetorical, I think it is to be preferred. The theological reason is, that we are not taught that the converts of the Gospel shall consist principally of the young, but that inqui-

ners of all sorts shall fly as clouds and as doves to their windows in their energetic wish for salvation. An interpretation, therefore, which narrows the triumphs of the cross to one class of mankind, fails to compass the breadth of the Divine plan of mercy. And the rhetorical reason is, that the explanation of this image I have given just includes and repeats, in a poetical way, the same statements which had been more simply made in the former part of the verse. Thus the former part, "thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power," expresses literally the idea of Christ's sovereignty, and this idea is found poetically expressed in the image of the early sunlight rushing, with the energy of youth, from the opening abyss of the morning.

Again, the expression "the beauties of holiness," in the former part of the text, although poetical in itself, is more exquisitely figurative in the image of the countless dewdrops glistening with the reflected beauty of the new light. Instead, therefore, of understanding the word "youth" as denoting the age of the converts, I would rather consider it as signifying the vehemence which belongs to that period of life, and thus denoting the energy of the grace of Christ. While, by the image of the dew, we may understand not only the number of the converts, but the shining beauty of their characters.

There are, then, in this passage, two leading ideas of cause and effect: first, the power of Christ's converting grace; second, the attractiveness of a converted character or the beauties of holiness. Let us proceed to set forth these ideas a little more at large.

First, the converting power of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power."

You will be struck with the manner in which the pen of inspiration brings together two suggestions or points of doctrine which are usually thought to be contradictory, viz:—the power of God and the will of man. Human philosophy has puzzled and confounded itself, time out of mind, in attempting to resolve the problem, how God can influence the will of man and yet man be voluntary and free. So high has been the dispute, that the schools of philosophy have ranged themselves in mutual hostility on this platform alone.

The single line of demarcation has been the question, whether the human will is free or constrained, whether man is a voluntary agent or an agent divinely necessitated. The one school has decried, with a sort of horror, the freedom of man, as if it were an invasion of the sovereignty of God. The other has refused the doctrine of

Divine constraint, as if it overthrew the responsibility of man, and sapped the foundation of a moral government.

Standing on the two extremes of opinion, these hostile armies have faced each other in open contradiction, shooting forth each its own arguments, which, however they rattled against the iron proof of their antagonists, fell hurtless to the ground. Or, if ever a champion were pierced by the convincing shaft and fell a victim to the controversy, the rival hosts still held their position without surrender and without a truce. On no middle ground have they ever met, nor suffered their flags to float side by side, to tell the world that truth is composed of more ideas than one. It is an almost touching commentary on our mental shortsightedness. It should make us fearfully distrust all extreme forms of opinion. Now, unlike the schools of men, God teaches us that the truth, which is to him a unity, is to us a complexity, that the world is a mixture, that man himself is a compound of opposite elements, and man's life a constant conflict of forces. Without stooping to explain to our imbecile curiosity the intricacies of the mighty problem, the inspiration of Almighty God, seizing on both parts of the question, joins them together in one statement of truth, and presses that statement in a

practical form home upon the bosom and the brain of every human creature. It will not allow us to be amused with the question, How can I be responsible to God if I am dependent on Divine grace? nor, on the other hand, How can I be dependent on him for salvation, when the responsibility is all my own?

The Bible does not scruple to declare, with that positiveness which belongs to certainty, and that assurance which is not afraid of paradox, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

It lodges that solemn injunction on our hearts, and it leaves us to speculate on it at our peril—to reject it to our perdition, or to act piously upon it to our joy and salvation. It is such a statement as this that we have in our text, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power."

Here are the seemingly repugnant ideas of man's will, acting in subordination to the Divine power, and yet acting freely, brought together in affinity and forming the solid product of truth by which you and I are to be saved.

In the day of Christ's power, when he shall put forth that power the strongest, then shall his people be willing, and their willingness shall be in proportion as his power is put forth. This, I

understand to be the meaning of the declaration. It is a declaration, which, however our speculative reason may demur, our hearts echo from those deep, dark chambers where conviction burns like pent up fire.

We *feel* it to be true, even where our understanding cannot grasp the truth, that there must be an inworking God to overrule our depravity, or else we can never be willing to be his. No matter where we find our witnesses, only let them be experts in human nature, competent witnesses, men who have thought enough of life and of themselves to have an intelligent opinion, men who have tried the experiment of holiness in their own strength, and they will testify alike. The Christian who has mastered his unregeneracy, and the sinner whose unregeneracy has mastered him, will both confess that without God we can do nothing. Both look up to a sovereign power above them: the one looks tearfully, thankfully; the other doggedly, discontentedly. The former thrills, while he adores, and says, "By the grace of God I am what I am;" the latter writhes, as if he were inwardly stung, while he complains, "I cannot repent, I cannot give my heart to God." This Divine truth thus has its human attestation, and man is witness for that God, that his omnipotence is supreme even over the spiritual dignity

of us immortals. And is not this the noblest aspect of omnipotence? We see that attribute in nature moving the dull inertia, and moulding passive material forms, and it is great and superhuman, wherever we see it. But here, it is power over that which is itself power; spirit, living spirit, self-motive, active spirit, and what is more, the repugnant, struggling, angry spirit of depravity. It lays hold on the best part of man, and bows it—the life of man, and subordinates it to the life of God.

All other demonstrations of omnipotence the world has familiarly seen, but converting power, changing the life of man's spirit, the spirit of man's life, is the select and peculiar glory of omnipotence. It exhibits the great Jehovah in the exercise which seems most like labor, and shows the might of his supremacy beyond all other proofs. And when, to this, you add the consideration, that the motive which urges this power is a motive of love, that this omnipotence is the omnipotence of grace, I am at a loss to conceive of any exhibition that can match this one.

There is a cool, indifferent, self-satisfied sinner; he loves the world supremely; he deems himself one of the world's most important personages; he is proud of his wealth, of his station, and if not of his intellect, yet proud of his opinion.



He receives the message of God with a supercilious scruple, as if he could adequately judge of Divine things in the strength of his own understanding, as if his untaught opinions were an oracle from heaven—God speaking in him—to supersede the body of revelation, which has illuminated all Christendom, and converted all Christians. See that man, as he hugs his very ignorance, rejecting Divine truth the more obstinately the nearer it comes to his conscience, and hardening his heart beneath the dews and the sunlight, the lightning and the rain of God's grace.

I have drawn such a picture, because it is the portrait of a character the most unlikely to be converted. His pride, and his ignorance, and his passionless hardness of heart, render him far less impressible than if he had quick and rampant feelings, acting out in a rude and sensual life. But look at him as the incarnation of bad and ungenial qualities, think of him as unfavorably as you must, and with as much pity as you can, he may be one of Christ's people yet, in the day of the Redeemer's grace and power. Some arrow, from the quiver of the Almighty, will pierce the obdurate heart. Some truth will flit past his mind with a ghostly look that reminds him of death, judgment and eternity, some remembered sin will fester in his conscience, and

the sense that he is in the grasp of God, will shake his stout pride. His cold blooded scorn will be changed to hot hate, and he will wrestle with the spirit in his heart as if for life or death. You might suppose him farther off than ever from the kingdom of Christ. But, one by one, new truths will crowd in upon his mind. His old impressions of himself will be crowded out. He sees more of his nature's sinful depths, and more of God's unfathomable purity; darker, broader lines of sin in his own history, brighter lines of mercy in the Divine dealings; until a certain tenderness grows over his feelings, not the raw, savage irritability of dislike, but a gentle tone of sensibility that is mellowing his heart, and preparing it to dissolve away in penitential sorrow.

Then he loves to go away by himself, and begins to think of prayer; and bye and bye he is on his knees, and his eyes, so often turned up in scorn, are now cautiously lifted in inquiring desire and humble confession. Their callous lids begin to pour out unaccustomed tears. His lips, so often filled with his proud reproaches of Christians and their religion, now labor and tremble with the big utterance of his sins. Thus, as he gazes, he sees the image of a bloody cross and a bleeding Saviour. He hears the earnest call, "Come unto me." The whole meaning of Calvary

flashes on his mind. He sees why there should be a Saviour. He understands the value of atoning blood and the preciousness of Christ. His soul moves forward, watching if it shall be repulsed. The nearer he comes, the more benign seems Christ's compassionate look. He hesitates a moment, it may be to unclasp some darling sin, that has battened, like a parasite, on his soul, and clings there to the last; and when this is done, he falls down and clasps the foot of the cross with the whole willingness of his longing soul. You know the rest; he is a justified believer. He has found salvation. He is one of Christ's people. What made him so, do you ask? Ask him; he will tell you, "Grace—pure sovereign grace. Christ's dear power acting in the day of his power." "But were you forced? was your will constrained?" "Yes, sweetly constrained, else I had remained in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity; but never was I so profoundly willing as in the soul-absorbing act, by which I grasped the cross. Never did I seem to myself so free and masterly in my free agency, as when I gathered up my whole being, and offered it as a tribute to redeeming love."

My brethren, this is the way to solve the paradox of Divine sovereignty and human freedom, practically, at the cross. Faith is the touchstone, pardon is the fruit.

I have here described only a single example; but it illustrates the day of Christ's power and the willingness of his people. In that prophetic period to which our text points, when that power shall rush forth like the volumed light from the womb of the morning, then, no doubt, there will be myriads of converts like the drops of dew. But in each separate instance we see only the same repeated process as now brings a sinner to salvation. Will those prophetic myriads shine in their regeneration like dew-drops in the sunlight? So does every single convert glow with the same holy beauty, for this is the beauty of holiness.

The beauty of holiness was to be our second topic of remark. The Psalmist employs the emphatic plural, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the *beauties* of holiness;" implying that these beauties are many. I appeal to you then, brethren, if there be not a certain intellectual beauty in this blending together of spiritual forces in conversion. God's sovereign omnipotence, mingling with man's free agency, without abasing the sovereignty or abating the freedom. God never more like God, than when he arrests the sinning soul in its recklessness, and captivates its whole being to himself; and man never half so much like a man, as when he

masters his depravity, renounces his sins and presents himself a free-will offering to his Saviour.

It is the beauty which the mind feels when opposing principles are reconciled, and repugnances dissolved, and deep mystical truth demonstrated by open experience.

I appeal to you again, if there be not the beauty of moral fitness in the transaction by which a disobedient servant is reclaimed to his rightful lord and master; a rebel lays down his arms, subdued to the constitutional authority; a sinner led to find a Saviour; a wandering star brought back to take its place in God's grand system of light. So much as the sweet harmony of the world has been broken by this jarring element of sin, the only discord in it, is not the sense of beauty awakened when that harmony is restored and the sin destroyed? Every conversion to Jesus Christ, tends, so far as it goes, to restore the original pattern of the creation, when God's smile reflected beauty from its unsinning and unpunished life; when order reigned unmarred, and all created being gravitated towards God. It is beautiful, then, to see a depraved and offending creature return where his duty calls, and forswear his insurrection, and take his holy stand in the ranks of Christ's people.

And I appeal to you again, if there be not an added beauty of holiness belonging to the character of the convert himself. In the willing surrender of himself to God's will, he becomes joined to him in union of nature and communion of spirit. A conformity to the Divine character follows the transformation of his will. God in Christ becomes the pattern of the believer's life. Now we know what constitutes the resplendent beauty of Jehovah; not merely that his power is vast, his wisdom infinite, his presence universal, but that his highest perfections are moral; that over all his attributes he throws the mantle of a pervading holiness, glorious in its purity, and flashing forth the full splendor of the Godhead. Of this Divine quality, the converted soul drinks in its fill. The God whom the Christian lovingly adores, he adores for his holiness, and while he loves, holiness shines forth from his open character, like the transferred beauty of heaven itself.

I will not point to every Christian as the model of this beauty, but I am sure you can remember some whose characters seemed to have been bathed in heaven; whose meekness, gentleness, piety, charity, beamed forth like rays of beautiful light; and when you traced them back, you found they flowed forth from a whole character of holiness which was itself one beauty.

God thus transfers himself to his loving child. The sinner adopted in Christ becomes Christ-like; and surely, if there be any attraction of beauty in our adorable Maker, that beauty becomes our own when God's shattered image within us is restored, and we are made anew in his likeness.

And how that holy beauty mantles the Christian more and more as he starts from his conversion and grows daily in grace; living nearer to Christ, and bringing thought after thought into captivity to him! How it sheds a new loveliness upon youth, imparts dignity to manhood, and makes hoary hairs like a glistening diadem! How every way beautiful is a converted life! How more than beautiful a holy death, when faith, and love, and hope, cluster about the pillow of the saint like a halo, never so purely bright and beautiful to our eyes, as when they are just going to light the soul's way to God!

Brethren, these are some of the beauties of holiness revealed by the power of Christ, like dew-drops by the rising sun. My Christian friends, what attractions does our God ascribe to us! I fear, indeed, that our hearts are forced to admit that this Divine beauty is soiled and marred in us, and we fail to reflect the loveliness of our adorable pattern. Then let us endeavor to perfect the image of this beauty by a close conformi-

ty to Christ, by humbler, holier prayer, and a more frequent remembrance of our first love. There is but one way of holiness, and that is full submission to Christ. His power and our willingness, which went together at our conversion, must abide together in our life—in our death. He in us, we in him. Let our holiness be from him, and his glory shall be on us.

I would that some heart, hitherto rejecting Christ, might be, this day, so drawn by the beauties of holiness as to seek his converting grace. My dear friends, think, if piety be of so winning beauty, how odious must be the deformity of sin! Can you bear that moral blur on your natures? Will you go to your grave thus, then, to stand up before your Saviour, face to face; he glorious in his beautiful holiness, you repulsively different in every quality? Come to him. It is the day of his power, of rich resurrection, grace able to convert you. Do not some of you see him on his kingly throne, bending his sceptre towards you, in token that he designates you for mercy and conversion? Do not turn away from the sign. He is able to save you, but not against your will; Jesus Christ never lost a soul, such is his power; but many a soul has lost Jesus Christ, such has been its unwillingness.



## SERMON III.

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### THE COVENANT.

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Psalm iii. 5.

“HE WILL EVER BE MINDFUL OF HIS COVENANT.”

NOTHING can bring home to our minds the thought of God so nearly, and so dearly, as to remember that he is a covenant God. As he manifests himself in nature and in the dealings of his providence, we are impressed, and sometimes awfully impressed, but not attracted and affectionately won.

Many things show us his distinct attributes operating here and there, and always operating wonderfully; his omnipotence moving in one track; his omniscience uttering itself in another; his omnipresence flashing forth splendidly, when it is most required and least expected; his justice always most inflexible against a world in arms; his truth, clear as the sun, and just as constant; and above all these separate attributes, like a crown of glory, his sovereignty constitu-

ting him God and Lord of all; his will, the universal law, and all his infinitude obedient to his will, giving no account of itself to any other being.

This is the way, in which we naturally look at God—a great and sovereign Lord and manager of the world, whose ways are past finding out. The religion of nature can teach us nothing better of him than this—He is distant, separated from us in the sublime and awful loneliness of his glory.

It is not until we open the volume of his revelation, that we witness anything more cheering to human want and weakness. There we learn that amazing truth, that God has hemmed in all his infinite attributes by a voluntary restraint. He has bowed the heaven of his glory, has come down to the human level, and entered into a mutual compact with man, on terms of equality. He has pledged his whole perfections for his part of the agreement; and his whole sovereignty is henceforward bound by fixed and known terms.

Here is the great value of the Bible to the world, viz: that it makes known the great God as a covenant God. Herein the Bible discloses the depth of wisdom which no created mind could else have fathomed, how God and man could

come together. Herein is the Bible, the man of our soul's counsel, the light of our feet, the lamp to our path in the pilgrimage to the other world, showing us how to be saved. Herein, again, is it the fountain of comfort to the weary and oppressed with sin and woe, pledging all Divine sufficiency for our relief.

The child of God loves to contemplate him in the covenant, for the terrible splendors of his presence are veiled and softened. He can praise God with no less of adoration, and with vastly more of tenderness. Thus the Psalmist looked upon him, and sang his honor: "I will praise the Lord with my whole heart. His work is honorable and glorious. The Lord is gracious and full of compassion. He will ever be mindful of his covenant. He hath showed his people the power of his works, that he may give them the heritage of the heathen. He sent redemption to his people. He hath commanded his covenant forever. Holy and reverend is his name."

We too are permitted to praise the God of the covenant, and to this happy exercise let me invite your souls, by considering, briefly, the history of the Divine covenant with man; then its nature and conditions; and, finally, its advantages. First, the history of the covenant begins with the

creation. When our first father came forth living from the hand of his Maker, when crowned with blessings, he stood the sole owner of Paradise, with a mind untainted by any sin, a probationer with a holy will; the conditions on which his lot was based were those of a covenant. He was made in subjection to the Divine law, and it was his duty to obey. There was then no impediment to his obedience. He had both the disposition and will untrammelled to serve his Creator, with his body, mind and soul. This would have been his duty, even if it had brought no recompense. If his life were only to last but a day, and then cold extinction were to wrap up his being forever, it would have been his bounden duty to render up that short and unhoping lifetime to Him who gave him faculties and life together. To live for God who made him and who owned him, was the very least that could be demanded by the law of nature and of reason. To live for God and die, was all that nature and reason suggested.

But revelation suggested more, because it was the revelation of a covenant. God came near to man, and holding before him the rule of his duty, told him, "Do this and thou shalt live—live immortally and happily with me; but if you fail of it, the consequence will be death—the death of

your soul, and an everlasting separation from me and the blessed.”

The covenant was open, just and honorable to God and his creature. But his creature dishonored it. How long he obeyed we are not informed, but he broke the covenant and forfeited its reward, and that forfeit entailed upon his race the miserable certainty that they too would sin and die.

This was the short-lived history of God's first covenant with man—the covenant of works, whose sublime justice and wisdom were defeated by man's free-will to sin. Then, while the misery impended, there came from the thick darkness a new revelation, but, like the former, still a revelation of a covenant; not now a covenant of works, but of grace—the promise of mercy to the fallen in those words of eternal comfort, “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head.” It was not only a new, but a better covenant than the former. That had promised remuneration to toil and patience, a reward to unfallen and unwavering obedience; but this revealed a hope for the lost, redemption for the ruined, and help for the helpless. If that were a covenant of works, this was the covenant of grace, described by the prophet in such encouraging terms as these: “Behold, I will make a

new covenant with my people after those days, saith the Lord; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers. I will put my law in their hearts, and in their minds will I write it, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more; I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people."

The first covenant was plainly adapted to state of man, while he yet wore his faultless faculties like a garment of light and beauty; while his heart was pure, his will unbiassed, and every power freely his own. The covenant of grace was suited to him no less after the noble freedom of his powers was lost, his mind degraded to the communion with sin, and his heart depraved to unholy loves. All that he needed, originally, in his unfallen state, was an incentive and a rule to obey; the disposition was his already.

But when, alas, he had fallen, he needed more—more than his own nature could beget, or the world confer—pardon for the sin done, power to sin no more; in a word, a new heart, a Divine life. The new covenant did not abate its demand of holiness; it required the condemned sinner to be conformed to God or die, but then it did not rest in an outward rule and an offered recompense. These would have only aggravated the woe of a poor creature, who knew that he was

guilty, and had no power nor heart to be otherwise.

The glory of the new covenant is, that it supersedes the outward rule, and transfers the law of holiness from tablets of stone to the living, converted heart. It makes the outward holiness spring from an inward principle wrought in the soul; so that the natural growth of regeneration would be up nearer and nearer to God's own image and likeness.

I said that this new covenant superseded the old so early as Adam's fall. Yea, in the forethought counsel of God it was older than this; for from the foundation of the world, when that sin of Paradise was darkly shadowed to the Divine foreknowledge, this grand remedy of redemption by a new covenant, was just as distinctly planned. We are told that He who secures to us this covenant by sealing it with his own blood, the great incarnate Saviour, was in the Divine determination slain from the foundation of the world.

That permitted fall of Paradise was thus made to exhibit more illustriously the character of the Most High, and bring his joined attributes into a more central light. It was fully demonstrated, indeed, when the Saviour paid the atoning price for our souls' rescue; and to us, upon whom the

ends of the world are come, it presents itself in its finished form. Its plan and theory are fully revealed. No new revelation will add to its conditions, or change a single feature. Every regenerate believer in Jesus has tasted its ripe fruit already. Each one of us must live and die by this covenant, for it is the last and only one whereby we can be saved.

Secondly, let us dwell a little then upon it, simply as it is a covenant.

As a covenant, it supposes that the two contracting parties, God and man, come together upon an equality. The transaction is mutual, binding each party while both are true; but releasing either when the other fails to make good his word. The first announcement of the covenant is in substance this:

“Immortal creatures, sinful, doomed and desperate, the God of Heaven speaks, ‘Why will ye die?’ “There is a great salvation provided for the lost, purchased with blood. It is to be had freely, without money and without price. I ask no hard conditions. I only ask that you would see yourselves as I see you; not through the medium of your own self-love, but in the light of eternity, as it will shine upon your death-bed. You are guilty; you are blind; you are corrupted in your souls. I only ask that you realize your



condition, and come with this conviction to the cross of the bleeding Emmanuel. Look up to him with the sorrow of your felt sin, and believingly commit yourselves to his saving power, for he and I are one, and you shall be saved. I demand only this faith on your part; while on my own part, I pledge each and all of my infinite attributes that all things necessary for your need shall be bestowed: pardon for your sin, comfort for your sorrow, strength for your weakness, grace for life and death, and joy for eternity, without any other stint than your capacity to receive it, or any other condition than the constancy of your faith in me."

This is the Divine proposition, and every candidate for salvation accepts it simply thus: The answer of his crushed and penitent soul is, "Lord, I will; I accept the offer; my sin is more than I can bear; it cries to heaven; I am powerless to save myself from the accumulated woe of so much guilt; it rolls forward in a mass of retribution, gathering blackness as it comes, and I am helpless to resist or to escape it. I am lost without a Saviour, and if thou wilt receive such an one as I, so unworthy, here, Lord, I surrender myself in faith to thy covenant of grace. If thou wilt take me as I am, I am forever thine."

Now, in a transaction like this, which is sub-

stantially the process of salvation to every saved creature, it is evident that the power, the grace, the whole efficacy of the covenant is on the part of God, and the sweet peace of believing submission is only from grasping the promises as a mere gratuity.

Mark, then, how all this freeness of blessing is secured, not by the power of man, but by the character of God. And here occurs the view I have already suggested, which renders God in the covenant so dear to the Christian. For each attribute of his is condensed, if I may say so, in the compact which he makes with each believer. His truth fastens his promise to the very rock of ages. His very righteousness holds him to the forgiveness of our sins. His omniscience is ever wakeful for our interests. His almightiness cannot wander to other worlds and new creations, leaving this lost and forlorn; for all his power is distinctly pledged to guide and govern us to glory—yea, all the sovereignty of his infinite freedom has narrowed itself to act not arbitrarily, but with one single aim, the redeeming of our souls.

All these attributes make him mindful of his covenant; and when to these we add the eternity that enshrines him, his dwelling-place, his nature's home, which makes him the great, unchange-

able I AM, we can understand the Psalmist's expression, "He will be *ever* mindful of his covenant."

Thirdly, now let us, in the last place, consider the value of this sweet truth in its application to life and practice.

Take first, then, the occasion at which I have already glanced, the first coming of a soul to its Saviour. However the complexion of the transaction may vary in different cases, its substantial features are the same in all. There has been, with every Christian, a time which found a conscious crisis in the history of his soul, when he first closed the covenant with God, when the sense of his perishing want brought him to his Saviour. Then he felt the lingering unwillingness of his unbelief, troubling his mind with doubts and his heart with fears. He was not sure that salvation was for him. He seemed to himself too unworthy to hope. His self-condemnation actually threatened to be more fatal to him than the sentence of God, for the Divine accusation was joined to the promise of hope; but his own convictions were without all encouragement. At that hour of discouragement, there is no reflection so productive of comfort as the remembrance, that the salvation of a sinner is a matter of solemn compact. The penitent does

not truly see God's countenance, with its look of reconciliation, until he sees him as he is in the covenant. His fears abate only when he looks upon the Crucified, and beholds the awful testimonial of his safety in every wound, and marks how every drop of blood falls like a new seal upon the covenant of peace. His doubts dwindle as he gazes, and his fears die out as his love begins to swell, until at length he is ashamed to doubt, and afraid to fear any longer; and with no less of humility, but with infinitely more of hope, lays himself at the Saviour's feet, believing and happy.

And again, this process is repeated, and God in the covenant becomes precious anew, in those periods of despondency which sometimes befall the best Christians, oftener in fact than they befall the worst. They may come from the conscious imperfections of our religious character, even while we are striving to live near to God; or they may arise after a long course of backsliding, when some affliction or calamity has stripped us of our self-complacency, and leaves us desolate. Then the life that is gone, seems a long dark omen, and our Christian profession a long falsehood. The broken vows of our covenant come back upon the memory, like witnesses of perdition; and the dismayed soul, thrown from its balance, knows not where to turn, nor what to do.

Gracious as God is, will he receive them again who have so wantonly turned his grace to licentiousness? Although a Saviour has died, yet have they not crucified him afresh, and put him to an open shame by their delinquent lives? Can there be hope for such?

Yes, my friends, for, just in the midst of this cloud, there is a rent and a chasm, and through that chasm there gleams a ray of light. It is a beam from God—God in Christ—God ever mindful of his covenant. Though you believe not, yet he abideth faithful. He cannot deny himself. He is pledged with all the stress of his infinitude to save you if you will. It is not he who has failed, for he has beset you behind and before, and laid his hand upon you, whether you would or not, striving to save you because he was mindful of his covenant. But it was your unfaithfulness that begat your fears and sorrows. You ceased to trust him, and relied on yourself. You forgot your prayers—forgot his pleasant communion, and now that you may learn how more precious is the covenant, he lets fall his chastening rod, and you halt, and lift up your unwonted eyes to heaven, and remember your own broken vows.

It is you, not he, who have been unmindful of the covenant. Can he forget the soul upon

which has ever fallen a drop of his Son's precious blood? It is not so easy to obliterate that mark. It ingrains the very soul—that blood of Jesus. It is the mark of the covenant, and, however it may be disguised by your errors, or covered over with your sins, “The covenant of the Lord standeth sure, having this seal—the Lord knoweth them that are his.”

Go to him then in the assurance of faith, even if it be with the sadness of self-reproach, and plead with him. Plead nothing but the promise. Plead his past mercies as the reason for fresh compassion. Dedicate yourself in faith, and your rejoicing spirit will join with the Psalmist's in proclaiming that “He is ever mindful of his covenant.”

Before we part, let me point out, to another class of persons, the bearing of this truth on them. “God is ever mindful of his covenant,” and his covenant is that he that cometh to him by Christ, shall in no wise be cast out, and “there is no other name given under heaven, whereby we can be saved.”

If God remembers this covenant, what shall that remembrance be to you? Oh! how full of disaster to the soul that rejects the gospel; who, on some unsound pretext, excuses himself from a serious attention to his salvation, and trusts to an

unknown mercy—shall I say?—nay, has no trust but upon the known displeasure of God! You choose a way which God has not chosen, but forbidden. You cast yourself off from a covenanted salvation, back upon the original condition of man without a covenant. You reject a Saviour, and determine to be tried by your own deservings. You will earn heaven for yourself, or lose it entirely.

Earn it for yourself! Will you abide that issue? Then, alas for you! for so sure as God is pledged in every attribute to be mindful of his covenant, so sure is the eternal Godhead pledged that you cannot thus be saved.

## SERMON IV.

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### THE RAINBOW ABOUT THE THRONE.

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Revelation iv. 3.

“AND THERE WAS A RAINBOW ROUND ABOUT THE THRONE, IN SIGHT LIKE UNTO AN EMERALD.”

THE beloved disciple who leaned on Jesus' breast, was permitted to enjoy that intimacy long after the Saviour had returned to the bosom of his Father. He was appointed the confidential prophet of the New Testament, to whom was unfolded the whole panoramic history of the gospel. Rapt into the heavens on a Lord's day, his spirit surveyed the unutterable glory of his Lord, and received the communications of his plans to an extent that was unrevealed to all the world besides.

The fruits of his Sunday's vision are described in the mystical book of Revelation, from which we have taken our text. Abounding in emblematic speech, this book utters its sayings so darkly, and presents its oracular truth in such a



shadowy form, that when to this uncertainty we add our own ignorance of the future, it is almost impossible to determine, in every case, its prophetic meaning.

When, therefore, this evangelist undertakes to show us, as they were shown to him, the things that shall be hereafter, he leaves so large room to be filled with untold details, that the reader's mind begins to throw in its own suggestions, and fills the outline of the picture with the arbitrary lights and shadows of conjecture. And hence it is that the prophetic delineation is so differently represented by different interpreters, each one colouring the prophecy with the hues of his own understanding.

But although this may be true of the prophetic portion of this book, I do not know why its other parts may not be understood as well as any other writing which employs a figurative style, and requires only the natural explanation of its metaphors and allusions; its doctrines and its precepts may be intelligible, however poetically conveyed, and when understood, are just as effective as if their language were altogether unadorned.

I trust, therefore, that we may, without any violence of interpretation, learn the mind of the Spirit from the passage before us, rich as I conceive it to be with Divine edification.

The chapter opens with an account of the manner in which the vision was introduced to the prophet's eye. "After this I looked, and behold a door was opened in heaven, and the first voice which I heard was as of a trumpet, talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit: and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and sardine stone. And there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald."

The apostle then goes on to describe the celestial attendants who surrounded the throne, and the homage they devoutly paid to him who sat upon it, crying, Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

But our immediate attention is rather due to the foregoing passage, in which he describes the theme and its glories. He that sat upon it was like a jasper and a sardine stone. "And there was a rainbow about it, in sight like unto an emerald." In this highly symbolic description, I think we may find a profound and interesting Christian doctrine; in the person of him who sat upon the throne, we at once discern the majestic presence of the Almighty. If we may suppose

this vision to be the same with that which the prophet Ezekiel beheld, it suggests another truth worthy of our regard. In the first chapter of that prophet's book, twenty-sixth verse, he says that "upon the throne which he saw, was the appearance of a man." Is not this embodied presence of Jehovah in human shape, the same Divine being whom the Scriptures call the Son of Man? and by comparing the prophet's vision with the evangelist's, must we not suppose that since the unalterable throne of heaven belongs to the unchangeable God, who will not give his glory to another, the glorious personage to whom St. John was introduced was none other than his once down-trodden Saviour, but still his incarnate God, now exalted to his mediatorial throne, and wielding the sceptre of his blood-bought dominion over the world. How beautifully does this sidelight of evidence bring out the colouring and deepen the impression of the great doctrine of Christ's Divinity, showing, in an incidental way, that it is the magnificent truth of heaven.

Next, our attention is called to the appearance of this august personage. "He was to look upon like a jasper and sardine stone." It cannot be determined with assurance what particular gem is here meant by the name of sardine stone, since there is no mineral, which in our time

is so designated. But from the best evidence we have, it would appear, like the jasper, to belong to the agate species, admitting of a high polish, and exhibiting various bands of bright and gorgeous colours traversing the stone in parallel directions. The meaning of the simile then would seem to be, that amidst the general splendour which encompassed the Divine presence, there were discerned the distinct hues of God's several attributes forming the very structure of his being, pervading his whole nature, and girding him with his Divine perfections like so many bands of glory and beauty. How true a similitude is this of the manner in which the Divine character is exhibited to our view!

When we look into heaven, we know the holy seat of God by the flood of living light, that is poured forth from his presence, and fills the heavens with its splendour. And at the first view we discover nothing but that vast and indescribable glory. But as our eyes grow accustomed to the vision, and we gaze into the midst of those bright depths, we then discern the distinct ribs of colour, which show the place and the direction of the varied attributes of the Godhead. We learn that the white effulgence that encircles his throne, is the blended light of all his several perfections, which inwrought into the substance

of his nature. There is the pure and pearly lustre of his holiness, showing the spotless excellence, which loathes iniquity as a stain. There is the bright cerulean band of his gentleness, his forbearance, and long suffering, that men gaze at so boldly and so wantonly.

And then, there is the golden vein of his imperishable truth, shining forth with the warm, rich splendour of the most precious attribute of God. And lastly, there is the deep crimson belt of the Divine justice, flashing forth the gorgeous and terrific splendour of an angry God, and forcing us to associate in our minds the Divine displeasure with the thoughts of blood.

When we thus survey the Divine character, and mark the distinctness of his attributes, we are apt to fasten our attention upon one or another of them exclusively. His purity impresses us alone, and we shrink and hide ourselves from him, because we are so unworthy and dare not come at his call. Or else his mercy becomes the quality we think of most, and we presume upon it too much, and grow daring in our misdeeds; or if we think of his golden truth, it only confirms our fears, or our arrogance, while the sanguinary hue of his justice, if we look at nothing else, drives us to despair. This is the effect of looking at the Divine attributes separately.

We exalt one and depress the rest. We learn to think of the selected one, as if it were the whole of his character, and then, when we bring in the thought of God's sovereignty and almightiness, and attach it to the favourite attribute on which we dwell most, that attribute seems to us unrestrained and lawless, overriding every other, and making him a God all weakness or all vengeance. Only suppose a Deity absolute in all his ways and will, liable to act as one or another attribute shall be uppermost; suppose an uncovenanting God, bound by no promise, pledged to no plan, and you unhinge the whole fabric of human hope, you throw down the gate for licentiousness or despair, to riot and lay waste the soul of man. "Save me," said Martin Luther, "save me from the hands of an absolute God.

Now to meet this necessity of our moral natures, God has been graciously pleased to reveal himself as a covenant God, and this I suppose to be the import of the symbolic description of the text, "There was a rainbow about the throne." The rainbow was the instituted sign of the covenant which God established with Noah. "I will set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And I will remember my covenant which is between me and every living creature of all

flesh, and the waters shall no more be a flood to destroy all flesh." Thus God bound himself by a solemn promise. He restrained his omnipotence. He built high walls to the path of his displeasure, and pledged his whole sovereignty for the safety and comfort of mankind. But he has likewise entered into covenant with us for our spiritual life, a covenant of peace and of salvation revealed in Jesus Christ, and foretold by the prophet, thus: "This is the covenant I will make with them in those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their hearts," and "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people; I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

Because, therefore, the rainbow was the world-wide token of God's temporal covenant, it is adopted in the figurative description of St. John, as the sign of that better covenant in Christ Jesus. And thus, from these words, "There was a rainbow about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald," we eliminate this beautiful, and heart-cheering truth, that the High and Mighty One who sitteth on the throne, clothing himself with the splendours of a universal sovereignty as with a garment, has so girdled that throne with his voluntary covenant that he is

pledged never to use his sovereignty, except in the prescribed way of his promise and his oath. He has fixed the bounds of each moral attribute of his nature, as if he should say, "Thus far shalt thou come and no farther." He has bowed the heavens and come down to the human platform of agreement and bargain. He has entered into terms with mankind, which last as long as this probationary life, and these terms are all confirmed by him with an oath and the pledge of his Son's life. It is the new covenant in his blood. On these securities the covenant is built, like a wall of flashing adamant about his throne, to hem in the absoluteness of his sovereignty and to reflect back his faithfulness, or rather like a rainbow encircling his presence, green like an emerald.

This, then, is the general import of the text. Let us now analyze its meaning, and view it in its parts.

First, then, because when we look at God we behold him in the covenant, there is no room for those partial views of the Divine character of which I have spoken. It is not in the jasper and sardine stone that he chooses to present himself to us. He does not display his attributes in the separated bands of light and glory. It is God in the covenant, God as he has bargained to



be, not God as, in his absoluteness, he was capable of being. No man has a right, God has not permitted it, to insulate the Divine attributes, and brood over one to the neglect of the rest. No man may sink with despair at his absolute vindictive justice, for the covenant is a covenant of reconciliation. No man may basely trample upon the Divine tenderness, as if it had no limit, and no recoil, for the covenant declares the terms on which alone his mercy shall be shown. No man may rightly shrink away from the Divine holiness, because he is impure and guilty, for the covenant's first word is, that heaven is satisfied for human guilt. And finally, no man may misuse the truthfulness of God, to countenance either his fears or his presumption, for the whole faithfulness of God is absorbed and concentrated upon the maintenance of his covenant. Yield up your minds then to no partial view of God. Look to that bow, set like a jewelled canopy above the throne. Let it mirror forth the blended beauty of all his attributes, and when you would understand what he is to us, read it in the book of the new covenant.

Again—The covenant, let us remember, is the covenant of God in Christ. He is called the mediator of the new covenant; and again, “I will give thee for a covenant to the people.” It is in him and his blood that the covenant is sealed, and

hence it is, that in him alone God manifests himself to men. This is beautifully typified in the text. The rainbow itself is formed both by the refraction and the reflection of the solar light. So that the insufferable blaze which floods the sun's vast disk, is first broken into its prismatic hues, then joined in the sweet and tempered colours of the bow, and reflected to our eyes in one tall earth-crown of mellow light and beauty. So is it in Christ Jesus. Because no man could behold God and live, and men turned away their scathed sight, he revealed himself in a new way. He embodied his essential brightness in the person of his Son. Upon his incarnate nature he poured out the fulness of the Godhead, and every perfection of the Deity entered into the person of Emanuel. There, like the flashing beams of heaven's light, the brightness of the Father's glory was refracted into its primitive rays, blended in soft and gentle colouring, and reflected towards us in the mellow beauty of humanity divinely perfect. We can gaze upon him, and not be overpowered nor dismayed. We can admire the intense beauty of each Divine attribute, as it throws forth its peculiar tinge of glory, and yet we cannot tell where each one begins to blend with the next, to make up the collective beauty that adorns our living Saviour.

In the life of Christ we behold the acting out of the living Godhead in the perfect display of purity, tenderness, and truthfulness, joined with the most holy severity of justice. And in his death we behold him the patient, as he had been the agent of all these attributes of God, suffering them even as he had practised them, offering a God-like atonement and sacrifice to justice, in order to secure the covenant of peace.

He was indeed the rainbow of the covenant, gathering into himself the several attributes of God, for in him mercy and truth met together, and righteousness and peace embraced and kissed each other. In him alone will God now be seen, God in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. He reaches out his atonement from earth to heaven, and spans the height of God's sovereignty with its mighty arch. He it is who makes the covenant of God a covenant of redemption, and changes the seat of judgment to a mercy seat. In the rainbow of the covenant then, behold the atonement of your Redeemer, and adore the God incarnate, who was manifested to take away our sins.

Again—As the rainbow stands like two radiant columns upon the earth, yet reaches its crown up to the skies, so does the covenant join our human hopes with the glory of heaven. It is a

celestial band of many colours. It is strong with its seven-fold cords of holiness, justice, truth, love, wisdom, authority and power—strong enough to sustain the weight of a world's salvation. There is no condition too abject to be relieved by this heaven-descended mercy. It drops its bright lines of comfort along the hill-sides, and into the depths of the lowliest vale of human life. It sheds the consolations of God in Christ into the soul of the humblest child of the earth. It is no arrogance now for the most unworthy to aspire to a place with God. In the mysterious person of Jesus, there was such a union of the Divine with the human; God incorporating himself with man in a joint and common life, that while we stand amazed at the phenomenon, we learn that it is just as possible for man to inherit God as it was for God to become a man. We learn that no height of glory is inaccessible to him who mounts up by the covenant. We are comforted to think that we, standing here upon the footstool, may look up to the throne. We need not say, Who shall ascend up into heaven, that is, to bring Christ down from above—or who shall descend into the deep, that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead? Joined to the covenant Emanuel, we are one with him as he is one with God, and because he lives,

we shall live also. Let no Christian then despond in surveying the loftiness of his destiny. Stand amazed, indeed, at the mighty stoop of that majesty which bends over your sinful head the bow of promise; but do not mistrust the mercy, for Christ is in that bow, and all the promises are yea and amen in him. Moreover, as the rainbow in its circuit may span the whole horizon, so is the covenanted mercy of God free to whomsoever will. As there is no realm on which the sun does not shine, no region of atmosphere where its beams are not broken up and reflected in the beauty of the bow in the clouds, so there is no nation of sinners, and no latitude of iniquity to which the covenant does not offer peace through Christ Jesus.

He came to be the propitiation, not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world. His blood cleanseth from all sin. The invitation of his mercy is to all. "Look unto me and be saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else." "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye unto the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat." "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come, and let him that heareth say, Come, and whosoever will, let him take the waters of life freely." But let us not pervert the freeness of mercy. We

would, above all things, impress you with the truth that it is the mercy of a covenant.

We are not to argue that because this grace is so large, it is unconditional. God is indeed reconciling the world to himself, but only in Christ. He is able to save to the uttermost all those, but only those, who come unto God by him. The whole work of redemption is transacted by the one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. The whole Divine authority of pardon and peace is transferred to him, so that there is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we can be saved. He is the agent of the covenant, the ambassador of God.

We may dislike the terms he proposes, we may resist the demands he makes. We may refuse to come to his cross to be saved, as guilty and ill-deserving creatures. We may scorn the absurdity of being saved by the merits of another, clothed in a righteousness that is not our own, and hidden, as it were, from the searching eye in the depths of a Saviour's sacrificial worth. But if we do so, we delude ourselves. God will transact no business with men, but through his authorized mediator. Every communication from him to us, is only through Christ, and for his sake. Every petition and appeal from us to him,

must pass through the mediator's hand, and be signed with his cross and blood, before it can reach the eye of the King of kings. No prayer is answered from the court of glory, unless it be seconded by the silent intercession of Christ, showing his hands and side to intimate, "Father, I will." "Let it be done." If there be mercy with God, Jesus is the day-spring from on high, whereby that mercy hath visited us. If God be love, yet in this is the love of God manifested by giving his Son, that whosoever believeth in him should have life, and he alone. I do not say he could not otherwise show mercy, but human reason sees no way without infringing his justice or his truth; and I do say, with still more assurance, that he has not only told us of none, but has declared there is no other name whereby we can be saved but the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Trust not then to an uncovenanted mercy. Beware of an absolute God. Rely not on the unpledged attributes, but the promise. Behold him not upon the throne, but in the rainbow. Behold him in Christ, and be saved, for God out of Christ is a consuming fire.

Once more, our attention is attracted to the description of the rainbow given in the text, "It was in sight like an emerald." By this I understand that, amid the beauty of its joint colours,

there was the prevailing hue of the emerald, refreshing always to human eyes, like the colours of the forest and the field, and showing in that bow the evergreen of the covenant.

When everything else is changing, the covenant of the Lord standeth sure, having this seal, "the Lord knoweth them that are his." All outward dependencies may fail, but God keepeth covenant and mercy forever. His unwasting life, fresh and almighty as it was in the back ages of infinitude, is signified in the title by which he used to enter into covenant with his servants, "I am that I am." The constant vigour of the covenant is confirmed by the sanction of God's life on which it is built. Since he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, "As I live, saith the Lord." How cheering is it to the fluctuating feelings of the child of God, to think of this evergreen life of the covenant of grace! When the whole firmament besides is torn by the storm, when a sombre, forbidding hue is overcasting the sky and the earth, as if its black doom were about to come; then he turns towards the bow in the cloud, and its hallowed light, betokening peace amid the tumult, shows that it is from God. And his life is hid in God because he is joined to Christ. And when he has wandered from the straight path, and fallen into



forbidden ways, and begins at length to think of returning to his God, it is an encouragement to his weakness to remember that the covenant standeth sure. His own altered feelings might lead him to suspect his Father's clemency. But the promise is perpetual, and the covenant is everlasting in its green beauty. "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself." The backsliding Israel may be healed. The prodigal child may return to his father's house and be received with sumptuous rejoicings, for the eternal God is his refuge, and his loving-kindness he will not utterly take from him, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail. Dear brethren, let us love this everlasting covenant. Let our piety be as fresh and evergreen as the emerald of the rainbow. There are indeed intermissions in our comforts. There are times when the bow does not appear. But in the sunny hours, when the light of God's countenance fills the whole firmament, we feel less need of the special comfort of the covenant.

It is in the darkness of our overcast souls that we want a comforter and a hope. Whenever then you are most cast down, whenever the storm beats hardest, whenever you are most disturbed by griefs or sins; in the hour of your peculiar need, you will find the covenant nearest. The sun will break through the cloud of trouble, and

on the black bosom of the receding tempest, you will see the mild light of your covenant God and Redeemer, and that light will be like a voice to your spirit, "Fear not, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

Let us remember, moreover, that as the covenant makes God our own, so likewise it binds us and ours to him. I entered into covenant with thee, he says, and thou becamest mine. In the solemn act of our union with the Saviour, we renounced all other righteousness and mentioned his alone. We forsook all other gods, and chose him to be our portion, all other masters to live to Him who died for us and rose again. Let the green hue of the rainbow typify our faithfulness as well as his, and whenever we resort to the covenant for its blessing, let it be with a spirit as willing as that which we implore. When we ask God to be faithful, let us be ready to renew our own dedication, "Here Lord, I give myself away."

## SERMON V.

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### THE BRAZEN SERPENT.

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John iii. 14, 15.

“AS MOSES LIFTED UP THE SERPENT IN THE WILDERNESS, EVEN SO MUST THE SON OF MAN BE LIFTED UP, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH ON HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.”

OUR subject to-day is an exhibition of the scheme of salvation and eternal life. Christ and his cross are all our theme. We are to compress into this brief half-hour the consideration of that plan which was conceived in eternity, and ripened by the growth of centuries. We are to declare the message which, the apostle says, is worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus died to save sinners. It is an ancient story, familiar to you as a tale thrice told. It has been proclaimed to many thousands of perishing creatures, and although it speaks only of love without mixture, of mercy without solicitation, and of salvation without price, it has been rejected to the condemnation of very many whom it was meant to save. A stumbling block to the Jew, and all

who are slaves to the Jewish pride, foolishness to the learned and witty Greek, whether found in Europe or America; our doctrine by them and such as they, has been slighted, as if it were of no import, scorned as if it were contemptible, or trampled under foot as if it were odious and hostile. Yet it is both the power and the wisdom of God, combined for the salvation of sinners, and God has chosen it as his instrumentality to reclaim an apostate world. Moreover, it is the savour both of life and of death, to those who hear it. There is garnered up in it a redeeming wealth and power to buy you from perdition, and there is given to it a weight which makes your downfall heavier if ye despise or reject it. This doctrine of Christ and his cross always testifies for God and contrary to the sinner, so that at the judgment day it will be a swift witness against the impenitent, and it had been better for him then never to have known the way of righteousness; and the unevangelized will have a better lot than he. I have plied the arguments of this great doctrine so often; we have stood upon this corner-stone of all saving truth so long in your presence; I have lifted up so unweariedly this cross, all stained with hallowed blood, that I am not without a misgiving lest some should be gospel-hardened, and should turn your

ears away in disrelish of this familiar truth. But it is not one blow of the hammer that always breaks the flinty rock, and the minister must content himself to urge line upon line, precept upon precept, in the hope that by and bye there may be a displacement of some sinful prejudice, the crushing of some guilty passion, the yielding of some old indifference, until the whole heart of stone shall be broken, and the fountain of penitential tears shall gush out. Therefore it is, when the minister pleads with your souls, and so often tells you of Jesus Christ and him crucified, because he knows it is heaven's mighty implement of truth, that he is nerved to our work week by week. He is not wearied in striving to save you, because he hopes that ye may yet be saved. And since, if ye are ever saved, there must be some ministration of truth to save you, I call upon you, fellow Christians, to pray fervently, while I speak, that I may not speak in vain or worse than in vain. It may be that this half hour may date the immortal bliss of some soul now without all hope.

The words of the text were originally spoken to Nicodemus, the Jewish ruler, when he came to Jesus, and they held their memorable evening's conversation on the subject of the new birth of the soul. It was a strange doctrine to the

Jew, and he demanded, "How can these things be?" The Saviour explained the matter, pointed out the method of regeneration, and preached to him the cross, the doctrine that was afterward like a firebrand thrown into the midst of the Jewish Church. He exhibited himself as the atoning sacrifice for human guilt, declaring that, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

The text contains an allusion to an historical event recorded in the book of Numbers, and since that event of the Old Testament is cited to explain the doctrine of the new, we will advert to it.

In the 21st chapter of that book, from the 6th to the 8th verse, the account is written as follows: "And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against thee; pray unto the Lord that he take away the serpents from us; and Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole, and it shall come to pass that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live."

There is a difference of opinion whether this transaction was arranged by Jehovah to be typical of the gospel or not; and whether or not the minds of those punished Israelites beheld in the brazen serpent an emblem of the Saviour lifted up upon the cross.

But it is a question we need not consider. Whether that transaction was designed to prefigure salvation by Christ, or the resemblance was afterward discovered, it is at least true that a resemblance there is. The Saviour himself has drawn the parallel. He has compared himself to the brazen serpent, and has made it sure that the salvation of sinners must be effected in a manner analogous to the healing of the bitten Israelites. I know not how there can be any dispute here. I know not how the abettors of any peculiar systems of doctrine, who will believe the simple words of Christ, can deny that what the monumental serpent was to that ruined camp, such is Christ to the wretched host of transgressors. I shall attempt, in this discourse, to show you how closely the parallel runs, and although I cannot, in our allotted space, enforce the several topics, by all the evidence that crowds about the subject, yet I shall endeavour to leave you impressed with three truths, all of them implied in the text, all of them scriptural, and all of them

highly important to your choicest and everlasting interest.

The first of these is the picture of human sinfulness as it is illustrated in the condition of these distressed and dying Israelites. If the atonement of the cross is effectual to the sinner in the same manner that the brazen serpent was to those sick and dying men, then we may infer that the sinner's condition without an atonement is much like theirs without the divinely appointed cure.

And what think ye, my brethren, was their condition? We might make large drafts upon our imagination, and not frame to our minds an adequate conception of its horrors. But you must remember they were encamped in the wilderness, and their camp was invaded and beset by venomous reptiles. And this was in consequence of their rebellion against God. They had no defence nor protection. The serpent might spring upon them from his coil as they walked near his thicket. He might crawl beneath the folds of their tents, while they were lying in their easy slumbers, and plant his fangs in their flesh, and as the wound and the smart awoke them, their enemy had glided away, and him they could not kill, but his venom they retained. Multitudes were bitten and diseased by



these subtle destroyers, and the serpents' bites were as when a pestilence comes. On every side you might have seen men gasping and heaving in the last mortal struggle. The angry poison was foaming in every artery and vein, and running along the capillaries of the smallest fibres. The system was surcharged and swollen with the elements of death. It is a hideous conception of human suffering, but you know how quickly and terribly a rattlesnake's bite causes a man to stagger blind and bloated into his grave.

We are startled when Jesus Christ intimates that sinners are so poisoned by the moral venom of that arch serpent Satan. But let not the qualms of sensibility or an injured self-complacency forbid us to gaze right at the living truth. Let us muster our courage to encounter this vision, and I pray God, that when ye see your danger, ye will long to hear of the remedy we shall presently tell you of.

The truth of the Saviour's analogy then obliges us to believe that men have been sorely bitten. They would rebel against God, and so God left them to the invasion of their enemy. He assaults you in your public walk—rushing at you unawares when you think not of him, and so, by some overpowering lust, he destroys you; or else he glides out into your path, bites your heel, and

makes you stumble and fall into some secret sin. And he creeps into your habitation, and there he destroys you by too much delight in other than God. Yes, and the Christian knows right well that even in the sacred privacy of his closet, when he thinks himself alone with God, there, at his very side, is the serpent coiled up with his glistening eye and ready fang, to fascinate him with spiritual pride and worldly desires, or wound him with blasphemous thoughts. You know the Scriptures well enough to know I do not speak extravagantly, when I say the human race is poisoned; that sin has struck its fangs into the moral nature of man, and planted its drop of venom in the soul, and that drop is subdivided, and transfused through all the channels of moral feeling and affection, so that every son and daughter of Adam have inherited this tainted nature. Do they not love other things than those sacred and spiritual objects which Adam loved before he fell into sin? Is not the conscience, which is the eye of the soul, so bleared and blinded that they fail to note and follow the will of God, calling good evil and evil good? Are not their hearts swollen with pride, envy and ambition, and their souls fascinated with the glitter of pomp and fantastic fashion, and rich display, and lulled with the music of reputation,

just as men, who are charmed by a serpent, are said to see bright colours and hear sweet sounds? And are not some giddy with prosperity or the hope of being prosperous? Just so the brain reels in a sort of delirium, when the serpent has bitten a man and the poison floats up into the sensory.

Indeed, my brethren, if ye will be content with God's solemn word, we may say, The whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint; and from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot there is no soundness in man's moral constitution. The whole world lieth in wickedness, and, of the unregenerate and uncured, there is none that doeth good, no, not one. The moral exercises of such men are evil continually, and so desperate is their condition by nature, that the Scriptures do not scruple even to say, They are dead in their trespasses and sins.

This teaching, so mournful, of the Holy Ghost has been echoed too, very mournfully, by the experience of men like us, and yet, perchance, better men than any of us. The long-drawn sound of Christian conviction has reached us from afar, even from the first ages of the church, and has put words into our mouths to use whenever we draw near to God; and as you and I bow down here together and speak to our Father

in heaven, and confess there is no health in us, what do we say but that we are diseased and poisoned by sin? The truth is, the old serpent has bitten us all. You may not love to acknowledge it, when you are so plainly charged with it, but you sometimes give an unsuspecting evidence that you believe it nevertheless. For you make laws against the outworkings of human corruption; you have bonds and sureties, and notes of hand, and bolts and bars, and prison-houses, and sheriffs, and men of war. Why is all this, if it be not because you cannot trust your neighbour? Why, if you do not believe in human depravity?

Nay, those who are not so orthodox as you are, have acknowledged it. Even the sagacious infidel, as he deems himself, who would fain sweep away this everlasting record of God's truth, the Bible, because he thinks it light as a cobweb, a tissue of absurdities, the chief absurdity of which is the doctrine of man's corruption, even he has fairly recognized the truth which lies at the threshold of salvation by Christ. Has not Infidelity's most philosophic champion, Jeremy Bentham, in his system, which is the only infidelity of modern times that can be called philosophy, because there is none so thorough and consistent, and compact and large—has he not, in

almost this precise phrase, declared that mankind are prone to every kind of vice; and, for that reason, constructed a system of ethics in order to disenthral the world of its incumbent iniquity? And Bentham wrote by the light of all history, when he declared men are wicked in grain. For I might challenge you to show the spot on the shaded surface of human story which is a spot of pure brightness, except in the memoirs of Jesus Christ, the Divine man.

But, my brethren, do you candidly think there is a soul with us here to-day which has not been bitten? I do not charge you with being idolaters, robbers, adulterers, murderers; I must find my audience elsewhere when I would lead such men to Christ. But to the man of shining morals, and amiable temper, and lofty deportment, and withal of a clear intelligence, such as this assembly embraces, the question is, whether you are not by nature unholy. If, instead of the testimony of men, you would seek a better knowledge; if you would remove that tissue of gentle manners which hides you from the world, and the self-complacency that veils you from yourself, and just suffer a stream of light that beams from Jehovah's great law to radiate your conscience; would you lift up your head from that inward survey and say the serpent had not poisoned you?

Nay, you would sing another strain. You would cry, "I am shapen in iniquity." You would look fearfully up to the Holy God and say, as a man said, who was thought righteous in his day, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee, wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." You would see "that hideous sight, a naked human heart;" and while you felt the poison flowing along with every pulse of your soul, you would cry out, "What shall I do to be saved? The serpent is upon me. I shall die of his venom! Oh! is there no cure?"

Yes, dear brethren, a cure there is—bless God for it—"for as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

And this brings us to the second of the three topics we were to examine here, and, having surveyed the condition of sinful men, let us examine the remedy which God proposes to cure us withal. The remedy of the serpent's bite, you remember, was a serpent. That which had poisoned the Israelites was the same which conveyed the cure; and so it was and is with sin. Man's sin was the venom, and so a man brought the healing. The first Adam destroyed us, and

the second Adam, which is Christ, gave us new spiritual and immortal life; and "as by man came death, by man came also the resurrection from the dead." "As judgment came by one unto condemnation, so the free gift came by one, even Christ, unto justification of life."

Now we do not know why Jehovah chose to cure a serpent's bite by means of another serpent. We cannot tell what special fitness there was in making the destroyer defeat himself. For aught that we can see, it had been quite as easy and quite as beautiful, if God had silently sent into those sick bodies a new stock of the principle of life, and so helped the restorative power of nature to throw off the poison. The labour and pains of preparing the similitude of a serpent might have been spared, and the pomp of this public display might as well have been omitted, perhaps, some think.

Yet God deemed otherwise. It seemed good to the councils of heaven to determine that the cure should proceed in this manner, and in no other, so that if any self-sufficient Israelite, who was insensible to his danger, had ventured to demur at such a method of cure, he had lost his life as surely as if God had shut up his ear against the pleadings of the people, and refused them all relief. It is in this same way that

some people think and speak of Jesus Christ and his salvation. They cannot understand why Jehovah could not pardon sin and heal the sinner, without an atonement as well as by an atonement. "Is he not merciful?" say they; "where then lies the necessity of this profuse expenditure of suffering, this pomp of sacrifice, this blood-shedding and death? Could not God speak a life-giving word to the sinner, saying, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee, be healed and live forever;' if he could do so, would he not? I am displeased with such a method."

It is not my purpose to defend the method, and attempt to show why heaven adopted it, but only to say it is heaven's own method; and God has decreed that, since the sin came by a man, salvation should come by a man; neither is there salvation in any other than he. Wherefore, if there be a guilty and sin-poisoned soul in this presence, who feels so little the wretchedness of his condition that he can cavil at the plan of salvation by the cross, while he may claim our Christian pity, I have nothing to answer to his cavils but "Thus saith the Lord, there is no other name given under heaven among men whereby ye can be saved, than the name of Jesus of Nazareth;" and the inference is, that if you reject God's *method* of showing mercy, you are



as surely ruined as if mercy were not one of heaven's attributes.

But there is another peculiarity in the case, which comes before us while we are considering this remedy for the serpent's bite, and belongs equally to the redemption by Christ.

There was nothing in the substance from which that serpent was shaped that had the power of healing. Even though it had not a venomous nature, we can all perceive there was nothing in the serpent's dead form which could cure a living serpent's bite. And yet there flowed out of it such healthful influences that the man who believed God's word, and looked upwards to that lifted piece of brass, found himself restored and well.

The explanation of the matter is, God sent down a Divine quality to charge and fill that lifeless effigy of brass, so that the serpent on the pole was to all that people as if it were God; and so God cured them by the serpent's form.

Now we see the same thing exemplified in Jesus Christ. It was not possible that man could atone for man. What is human blood more than the blood of bulls and goats, which can never take away sin? What inherent power is there in humanity to meet the perfect demands of the divine law? How can a creature have such

superfluous excellence that he shall make amends for all the sins of all his fellow-creatures in all time? There would have been no healing power for sin in the man who was lifted up on the cross if he had not been a Divine man. It wanted something to be superadded to his humanity, and so the Deity became himself incarnate; and when we look upon the person who was crucified for sin, if we look with a true faith we behold not simply a man like common men, nor even a man whose nature was pure and innocent, and without venom, but upon a man in whose flesh was tabernacled all the living energy of God; and that energy flows out into the believer's soul, and heals and saves him from his sins.

Very great is this mystery of godliness; God manifested in the flesh, seen of angels, believed on in the world, received up into glory. But if you let its mystery stagger you, so that you refuse to look to Him that is lifted up, I must repeat it, that you cannot be saved, for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not ye escape if ye refuse Him who speaketh from heaven.

He is lifted up before you to-day, as it were visibly crucified for you, and I desire to prevail with you by the virulence of that sin wherewith you are poisoned, by the agonies of that death

that follows unforgiven sin, by all that is so delightful in the healing of Christ's blood, and by all that is free, gracious and easy in the application of the remedy, I desire to prevail with you that you may be saved.

But our subject is not fully surveyed until I have spoken more of the ease with which the remedy is applied—the topic just glanced at.

And this is our third topic. The Israelites were cured by a look at the brazen serpent. "It came to pass if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass he lived"—and just like this is the sinner's justification by faith in Jesus Christ. The prophet knew it, when, in the vision of the future Saviour, he cried, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth, for I am God, and there is none else." And the Evangelist, when he said, "To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." And faith is a cordial acquiescence in God's appointed way of salvation. It is the submission of the heart to Christ. It is the casting one's self down at his feet, as the only helper. Faith does not consist in the multitude of prayers, nor in the solemn determination to strive to grow better, nor in fervid desires to be a child of God, nor in the

hatred of sin, nor in the strong cryings and tears, nor in a broken heart. It consists not in any thing you can do or suffer—but in just ceasing to do anything, and trusting to Jesus Christ to do all.

What could the Israelite do for his own restoration? Could he purge out of his system the infection of the serpent's tooth by resolving to do so? Could he cure his sickness by weeping? Did the poison rage less because he writhed and groaned under its pains? Could he save himself from dying because he had a fervent desire to live? No! his alternative was to trust to the Divine remedy, and suffer God to save him, or to die. And from the utmost limit of the Israelitish camp, whosoever turned upon the brazen serpent a single look of trust and hope was healed. No matter what the stage or degree of his sickness, he was healed. It was a mighty salvation.

Just behold the swollen limbs, and the parched tongue, and the glaring eyeballs, of those poisoned men. Listen to the incoherent ravings of delirium. See those mothers, absolutely brutalized by pain, casting down their infants to the ground, and pining away with the anguish of the serpent's tooth; and the babes themselves gasping with the agonies of the mortal infection. The whole camp is crowded, like a field of battle, with the dying and the dead. All at once a

loud cry is heard. God has provided a remedy. In the sight of the whole camp a brazen serpent is lifted up on high. One single look, and the cure was finished.

The distended limbs shrink to the dimensions of health. The eye regains its lustre. The maddened brain is cooled into quiet. A new life darts through the frame, and the restored man rushes to his feet, and flies eagerly to bring some dying friend within view of this conveyancer of life; and the mother's instinct is strong again, and she snatches up her offcast babe, and flies to hold it up before the brazen serpent of salvation.

Dear brethren, why may not this scene of rescue and rejoicing be re-enacted in this house of God to-day? Can you doubt whether you have been pierced and sickened by the tooth of sin? Can you doubt whether your souls are ruined? If not, then the value and power of the remedy you dare not doubt. It is the life-blood of God's dear Son.

The manner of its application need not startle you. Thousands have made trial of it and are healed; and they are now rejoicing with their souls' restored health, and a conscience at peace with God. They would gladly bear you in their arms to the cross, that you might look upon the Saviour and live. Renewed you must be, or you will die. You may be renewed here and now, by

casting yourselves upon the merits and mercy of Jesus Christ." He will cleanse you from your guilt, and procure all your salvation. It is his own truth, and the substance of Divine revelation, "He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned."

If I should preach to you the word for years, I can tell you of no new doctrine of life, no other cure for sin. If I should spend all my days with you, ministering to your souls, and follow you to your dying chambers one by one, and stand over you as you breathed out your life; or if I should be called to go before you into eternity, and should give to my beloved flock a pastor's dying testimony, I could tell you only of that by which I hope to be saved—the cross of Christ. As a dying man speaking to dying men, I could only lift up my voice, and say to you, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life."

And so would I lift up my voice to-day, and with a more than usual impression of eternity on my mind, I would speak to dying men, and offer to you, in God's name, a free and instantaneous mercy and forgiveness. How can ye escape, dear friends, if ye neglect so great salvation?

## SERMON VI.

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### REPENTANCE A PRIVILEGE.

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#### PART I.

Acts xi. 18.

“THEY GLORIFIED GOD, SAYING, THEN HATH GOD ALSO TO THE GENTILES GRANTED REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE.”

OF all the gifts of God to men, of all benefits, great or small, perhaps we could not name a single one which the world at large holds in such light esteem, as the precise one spoken of in the text, “Repentance.”

Nothing on earth that can be called a privilege, seems, to the large class of the unspiritual, to come in so questionable a shape, nothing for which they feel less disposed to thank God.

There are gifts whose sweetness is so much upon the surface that their first taste is pleasant. There are blessings laid at our very thresholds, and as we stumble against them the shock of our surprise extorts a sudden acknowledgment of the goodness of God.

And then there are moods of mind so simply peaceful, so unmixed with anxiety, that all men agree to call them joyful.

It is to such a condition, that men in general refer when you speak of privileges from heaven. But they never enter upon their catalogue of favours that state of mind which is designated in the text.

And this fact reveals the opposition between nature and grace, of which the apostle speaks, when he declares that the natural man understandeth not the things of the Spirit of God; for a heaven-taught mind thanks God for repentance as a boon.

The words of the text were the unanimous utterance of the Church in Judea, when they heard from St. Peter the story of the conversion of Cornelius. Strange as it may seem to unaccustomed ears, and unsanctified hearts, we must remember, my brethren, that they uttered the language of Christian experience. They spoke what they did know, and testified what they had felt. They were recently come from the trial of their own souls; they remembered the wormwood and gall of blood-guiltiness against the Son of God. The echo of that universal cry, "Men and brethren, what shall we do," had hardly yet died away. Their spirits were yet fresh from



the Pentecostal baptism; and they understood the sweetness of penitence inspired by the Holy Ghost, a special grant of favour from God.

Let us take their experience as our authority, and endeavour to elucidate the force of their expression. Before the annual season of our humiliation shall pass away, let us endeavour to learn more of its value. We will, therefore, undertake to illustrate this truth from several distinct considerations.

1st. Since repentance implies transgression; since the sorrow for sin, like all other sorrow, is itself a pain; since amendment is a tacit acknowledgment of past fault; it may seem almost paradoxical to say that repentance is a privilege, when contrasted with a state of innocence. Is not he happier who has never stained his soul with impurity, than one who has been steeped in pollution, even though he afterwards emerge from his baseness and sin no more?

Is not a state of perfect sinfulness so high removed from any condition of guilt, as to outgo all comparison of privilege?

When viewed in the abstract, apart from the circumstances of our condition, there seems to be a convincing force in the very statement of the question. For besides the demerit of transgression, as sin against God, there is the contamina-

tion it entails. And we cannot say how low its connections may descend. We cannot tell how deep is the pedigree of baseness to which a man allies himself when he joins his soul to a sin. It may be that the familiarity with degradation shall disqualify him forever for the highest purity. It may be that the breathing the atmosphere of wickedness may have tainted the life of his spirit beyond all purgation. The very contact with guiltiness may have infected his nature with an ill savour that shall cling to it always. It may be that one single transgression shall be like a weight to his feet, making his career of improvement lame and halting forever.

The shock of one sin may have so disturbed the harmony of his nature, and broken some of the affinities of virtue, that they shall never be restored.

It may be very plausibly argued, therefore, that innocence is better than repentance, and that the mere childish ignorance of vice is better than the wisdom of reformed profligacy.

If one should say that the sinlessness of Paradise was too great a price to be paid for the knowledge of good and evil, and that Adam was overreached in the bargain, it would be venturing too much to deny it. And yet it is only when we look at the essential nature of morals that we

can say so much, for it is only in the abstract view of the case that it is wholly true. But we are not to argue in the abstract. There are circumstances in man's condition which present the subject in a different light.

When we consider innocence as the requirement of a system whose object was the prevention, and not the cure of sin; when we remember that innocence once violated, could not by that system be restored, the question comes to us with a very different meaning. The question then is not, "Which is preferable, innocence or repentance, freedom from sin or reformation after sin?" but, "Which system is best suited to the condition of man as a creature—one which requires unsinning obedience, but holds out no remedy for a fall; or that which, after man has fallen, lifts him tenderly up, heals his wounded and broken nature, and places him again on the track of a hopeful probation?" So that the question results truly in this, "Which is the more favourable system for man, with all his liabilities, the Law, with its requirement of a perfect sinlessness, or the Gospel, with its free invitation to repentance?"

To understand it better, let us view the state of the moral universe without such a system. Travel back to the period when creation was

young; when over its wide bosom swept the freshness and beauty of a Divine touch, and it seemed glad with the reflection of Divinity; when the sons of God were glad in sympathy, and shouted for joy. Not a blemish marred its symmetry. No malignant touch disturbed the harmony of its laws. No footfall of the evil one had crushed a single plant of beauty, or trodden out the fragrance of a single flower. Neither had any moral mischief unveiled its ugliness, or stretched out its withering finger. Man was there, but as yet unsinning and pure. This is what we call his primeval innocence. His impulses were all accordant with the Divine will, and his nature in harmony with an untroubled universe.

But he was the subject of Law. There was one overruling condition on which his happiness and his life were suspended, and that was obedience. He was bound to give his supreme devotion, of body and mind and spirit, to his Father and Creator. Any departure from this law, a single act of sin, would instantly pervert his nature, destroy his peace, and distort his whole condition. Obedience, perfect obedience, would lead along his nature in an immortal expansion of delight, and an endless progress of glory. Nearer and nearer to God would he

approach in intenser communion of love with all holy and noble intelligences—his life would be more and more like a seraph's, and himself more like a son of God. Oh, how imagination revels upon this thought of the primeval capacity of our nature, and how freely she launches away into that realm of imagined innocence, with no leaden doubt to clog her wings, no reasoning to restrain her eagerness! We can hardly be too bold in the conception of that perfect state. Picture it then as we please, adorn it with as many graces of perfection as we may, and set it before our minds at last, a blissful human state—the question is, “Was that state preferable to ours? Was Adam to be envied by us?” At the first summons we may be ready to answer, “Yes.” But let us ponder the reasons for a different reply. This condition had one vital want—security. It was liable to be too easily forfeited and lost. One act of disobedience would deprave and destroy the whole. The law of that life, beautiful in its purity, was nevertheless terrible for its inflexible authority. It was armed against transgression with all the awfulness of goodness. It could not hold a compromise with disobedience without disgracing its author.

There was, therefore, no escape from the unchangeable alternative of perfection or destruc-

tion. And you see at once how this condition throws an uncertainty over the bright picture of this felicity of innocence. You see how the light comes tremulously from it, shining through that mist; and while we gaze upon it we tremble lest it should be clouded in total darkness. Now this was the inseparable danger of that state. From the very nature of law it might be broken. From the very nature of a moral agent he might break it. He was liable to inducements of spirit and of body, which might become overpowering temptations. He had a power of choosing between right and wrong, and while he had it, it was not within any human sagacity to be sure that he would not, in some idle moment, in the momentary excitement of some appetite, overstep the line of duty—turn away his face from heaven and fall.

The power of sinning was necessary to his free agency, and the power to sin is the twin sister of the liability to sin. This was the constant drawback upon the privileges of his state.

So long as he might sin; so long as he was encompassed by circumstances which might controul, and invested with faculties that might deceive him, with appetites that might grow while he slept, and from being servants change themselves to masters; so long as the very idle-

ness and repose of his felicity might beguile his soul into a sleepy forgetfulness of God; in a word, so long as his nature was finite and capable of falling, there was cast over the beauty of his life a precarious shade, that makes us sad with the sense of its insecurity. And when to this uncertainty of obedience we add the inevitable doom of disobedience, how much of privilege seems to be taken from this state of innocence! How perilous was the experiment of sinlessness! How like a blind man's walk along the precipice seems this enterprise of life without repentance!

One step beyond the crumbling brink; one swaying of the frame from the upright balance of holiness; one casual, momentary thoughtlessness might betray the soul to its ruin. Truly, while in the survey of man's original felicity we are impelled to adore the goodness of the Maker who fitted him for such bliss, we cannot but mourn in advance for the danger to which a finite nature is exposed, under any experiment of law. We naturally turn our gaze about to see if there be no easier conditions of bliss. We lift our eyes to heaven to humbly ask if this is man's irrevocable state. Must this dark omen forever overhang his life? Must the sweet joys of his innocence be poisoned by this constant fear of perdition and the doom of disobedience? Is it both inevitable and hopeless?

Is there not a weight removed from our spirits when we admit the idea of repentance as a remedy for this evil? Does not a light seem to break through the shadows of this uncertainty like a sun-rising of mercy? How far better suited to our wants is the provision of pardon for sin, than would be the requirement of innocence, even if our natures were pure and our impulses holy!

Now, remember that what we have been surveying together as possible, is mournful matter of fact. The career and trial of innocence has been acted out once and again. The very danger which we in imagination thought so formidable, has overwhelmed the creatures of two distinct races with ruin. The angels ran the gauntlet of that trial of innocence. They undertook the enterprise of a sinless obedience, and they fell from the top felicity of heaven. And if any man is inclined to murmur at the hard demand of repentance; if he should blame the arrangement which suffered him to inherit a sinful nature, and to be betrayed into sin; if he should say, "Why was I not made upright, and placed under a system which would have required an obedience that I could then easily render?"—let him turn his eyes to the issue of that experiment of the seraphim. Think you that if a herald should



proclaim to them the grant of repentance they would spurn it as an offence? If this were made the condition of their release, would they not seize it like creatures drowning in perdition? If they could be permitted to name the privilege which they most craved, would not the pains of their long penalty, the Divine desertion, the fierce remembrance of their early joy, all combine in one burning wish that God would try them again, not on the ground of sinless perfection, but on the probation of a godly and broken-hearted repentance?

But they are not the only probationers whose history shows the precariousness of innocence. Our own race, in the person of its sire, has ventured upon the same trial of character, and every unrenewed creature of that race is yet labouring with its consequences in the aversion of his heart from God and the fear of his coming doom. And when you remember this, and picture to yourself the disastrous condition of a world without innocence and without a Saviour, would it not come like a welcoming to the soul to be told of another probation for man? Would not the offer of repentance seem like the dove and the olive branch, borne over the bosom of desolation which has drowned the world, bringing to a man's soul a promise and privilege?

I say not, brethren, that God preferred sin to innocence, but I call you to admire the ineffable wisdom which has made man's downfall the basis of his salvation. I pray you to adore the matchless skill which, out of the most forbidding evil, has educed the highest good. He has made the wrath of man to praise him. He has made our sin to be the feculent soil in which our best hopes root themselves and grow in immortal vigour. The condition of each one of us is this day more hopeful than if sin had never entered the world. We should be this day less blessed in the enjoyment of innocence without a Saviour, than we are with all our sins, but with the privilege of repentance.

## SERMON VI.

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### REPENTANCE A PRIVILEGE.

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#### PART II.

Acts xi. 18.

“THEY GLORIFIED GOD, SAYING, THEN HATH GOD ALSO TO THE GENTILES GRANTED REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE.

WE have thus far endeavoured to show that repentance is a privilege, simply as a part of a more lenient system of government than the law; that the permission to be saved by repentance is more favourable to human nature and human hope, than the permission to be saved by an un-deviating innocence.

Let us proceed to illustrate our subject farther, and show that repentance is a privilege, by considering what repentance is, and what repentance does.

Repentance is a privilege, because it restores our fallen natures to the likeness of God, secures forgiveness, is a joy of itself, and terminates in glory. The very idea of repentance assumes the sinful-

ness of our state. Sinfulness implies alienation from God. The moral image of God, originally stamped on the human heart, was effaced by the first transgression. When man fell to that condition which the Saviour touchingly describes as "lost," there was a sad declension indeed from many inestimable privileges. But the noblest of them all was the intimacy of man with his Maker, the assimilation of affections and the oneness of sympathy. The separation was scarcely more terrible in its foretold consequences, than it was painful to be contemplated. The palace-home in the human breast, which God once illuminated with his presence, was now a deserted and blackened chamber, where only dark thoughts revelled, and dark deeds were hatched. The altar in the heart, where holy affections used to group themselves in adoring love, had become the seat of an evil spirit, who changed the pure feelings to vile affections, and turned the now deserted temple into a prison house of lust. This was the ruin of the fall. But repentance is restoration. When the Holy Spirit descends within the soul, and awakens it to repentance, the struggle that ensues is the conflict between God and the Evil One. That soul is to be the victor's trophy. And when the battle is over, and the repentance is complete, the face and

form of that soul are changed. The heart is illuminated again. The Deity has made his new home in the house now cleansed and garnished. The likeness of Christ is restored to it. "Thus saith the High and Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, I dwell in the high and holy place; with him also that is of a contrite spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." "I dwell in them and walk in them, and they shall be my people and I will be their God."

It is the indwelling spirit of God which begets conformity of nature between man and his Maker. This conformity is threefold. There is in the first place a unity of will. What God from heaven decrees, God in the soul seconds and conforms to God's expressed will, and becomes the rule of both the heart and life. The dispensations of his providence, whether they bind him down with afflictions or lift him up with prosperity, call out the glad consent of his will, to be, to do, or to suffer, whatsoever pleases the Most High. And next, there is the conformity of his desires, which, gushing out from their fountain in the regenerated heart, fall into the stream of the Divine purposes, and flow on, merged in perfect unity and conformity with his heavenly will. The conscience, which is the school-master of

our soul to bring us by the Divine law to Christ; conscience repeats the voice of God, lays its rod upon our restive passions, spurs our sluggish feeling of duty, admonishes, excites, commends or reprimands, not from the hot suggestions of temptation, but from the Divine oracles and the promptings of the Holy Spirit. So that the soul sees, as with a divine eye; traces out the bearings of moral truth, and the consequences of moral acts by a heavenly light, weighs the value of moral principles and rules in the balances of the sanctuary, and brings everything to the test of the Divine approbation. So the renewed mind has the mind of the Spirit.

And, lastly, the affections, the faculties by which the heart loves and hates, which once ran in the chase of sin, but always stopped and started back in shivering recoil whenever religion crossed its track, they too are renewed.

Formerly the loves of the heart were so low, that they were sometimes debased into lusts, but now their regenerated life reaches up to heaven. God is their noble object—a holy life their congenial end. The penitent man is now on the same footing with the unfallen—a friend of God. He is a soldier in the army of Jesus Christ, a member of the family of heaven, a child of God, a partaker of his nature.

Need I add anything to show that the repen-

tance that confers such a dignity as this is a privilege? May I not make the appeal, not merely to the heavenly-minded, but to the unrenewed? Would not the most besotted sense perceive an exaltation in an alliance with the Great Being of the universe? Is any heart so depraved from its original constitution as not to feel some lurking conviction, clinging to it like a half obliterated remembrance, that there is grandeur in such a destiny as this? Even among the ruins of this broken temple of the soul, though dragons are in its pleasant places, is there not a lingering echo of the Divine oracles which testifies that to be admitted to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the innumerable company of angels, and to the church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, is a privilege?

Who shall say that repentance is not a privilege, which changes the darkened spirit and gives it light from heaven, renews the decayed spirit with Divine life, purifies the polluted spirit with the power of holiness, lifts up the fallen spirit among the angels, in a word, transforms it into the image and likeness of God, and makes it a temple of the Holy Ghost? Such honour have all his saints.

Thirdly, Repentance is a privilege because it brings forgiveness of sin. If I had followed in my remarks the natural order of succession, in which this subject and the last occur in the Divine plan, I should have spoken of forgiveness before I had mentioned conformity to God. For doubtless in the Divine mind the act of pardon is antecedent to the full conveyance of those other privileges. But in the mind of the penitent himself there is usually a consciousness of some of those renewed affections, even before he dares to trust that his sin will be forgiven. I have chosen, therefore, rather to follow the order of spiritual experience than of the Divine purposes.

I say, therefore, that repentance is a rare privilege, because it is the single chain let down from heaven by which we may climb and reach the hope of forgiveness. No act of grace could bring a lasting comfort to the soul, which was not founded on a pardoning decree. No guilty creature could ever enjoy security, even in his regeneration, with the remembrance of unatoned guilt. I cannot conceive how even immortality could be satisfying to a redeemed sinner, unless he could bind to his bosom the covenant of forgiveness, sealed with the blood of a finished atonement. It is unforgiven sin that separates between the Christian and his God here on earth,



and drives him into backsliding. The fear that our guilt is treasured up in God's memory, and stands unblotted in his book, casts down the soul into despondency. It breaks the wings of our devotion, and unnerves the whole frame of our piety.

It is likewise the certainty of unforgiven sin, which creates the strong dislike, in the heart of an impenitent man, to the thought of God. He shuns the bright countenance because he knows it is unreconciled. He turns away from prayer, because prayer brings him face to face with his sins. He will not reflect, because reflection leads him forward to his last account. Sin unpardoned embitters his inward life, and adulterates every blessing, it arms death with its sting, and covers his eternity with a black pall. As sin is the enmity of the soul to God, so pardon is the slaying of that enmity. Sin is the wound of the soul, forgiveness is the healing. When you name the remission of sins that are past, therefore, you name a privilege, fundamental to all other enjoyment, a privilege, too, whose value is enhanced by the difficulty of its attainment. For to one who weighs aright the true evil of sin, there is nothing so improbable as its forgiveness. Our once awakened conscience, clamouring for retribution, knows nothing of forgiveness.

Conscience never pardons. Even in our regeneration she reproaches us with our sins. Even when God's reconciled eye bends down in complacency upon us, and we feel the thrill of that look darting through us, conscience is never appeased. Even in the flood of grateful joy that bursts from the broken heart of a forgiven penitent, in the first assurance of mercy, when he knows the wrath is averted and heaven is at one with him, conscience is at hand, probing him with new recollections of guilt, and admonishing him that he deserves no pardon. Conscience it is which often shuts up the offender in the despair of mercy, and which always increases the difficulty of apprehending the possibility of a pardon.

Again, the law of God, to which the blindfold sinner always clings for salvation, while he spurns repentance as too hard a condition—that very law, by uttering no tones of mercy, renders that mercy more precious when it can be had. In this predicament of despair the offending person is left convicted, self-condemned, inwardly punished, and fearfully looking for judgment and fiery indignation. And here descends the angel of mercy, with the grant of repentance for the remission of sins. No privilege on earth can match this offer, of which neither his soul nor

the whole world besides gave him any promise or suggestion. But repentance is the gateway of salvation, beginning with forgiveness. The plan of redemption opens itself before his mind. He sees how forgiveness is possible, because it was purchased. The atonement contradicts the verdict of his own conscience, and answers the demand of his sin-stricken soul. His repentance therefore involves an act of faith in his crucified Redeemer. His worst sin has been unbelief and rejection of Christ; his first amendment will be the surrender of his soul to him in a covenant of peace. This is the sure result of evangelical repentance.

Bearing in his hand the promise, he goes to the mercy seat and pleads the substituted righteousness of his Saviour. That name always prevails. His blood has atoned. The condemnation is reversed, and the sinner bears away the pledge of the highest boon in the gift of God, the Divine forgiveness and forgetfulness of all his sinful life. But he will not forget. That hour of his repentance which drove him to the cross, and gave him back his forfeited life, shall never die out of his grateful remembrance. Its date is hallowed in his mind. Its periodical return will be a holy day. The attendant circumstances will be engraved upon his memory. The friend

who persuaded him, the affliction that aroused, the sermon that first broke the sleep of his impenitence, will be embalmed in his most heavenly thoughts. It was the crisis of his destiny. It was an epoch in his soul's history that shall be luminous above other events among the remembrances of his immortality. For its happy consequences shall live through eternal ages, and as the series travels on, the blessings of that forgiveness shall be as fresh and fruitful as immortality itself. He will still look back with melting of heart to that first forgiveness, and will thank God again who granted him the inestimable privilege of repentance.

Fourthly, I have somewhat anticipated the reflections of this branch of my discourse, by speaking of the emotions of a penitent heart.

But I will add in the next place that repentance is a privilege, not only for what it brings, but for its own intrinsic sweetness.

I do not speak now of the happiness of being forgiven, but of the satisfaction of repentance itself. I may seem to utter a hard saying, but Divine grace has explained it to many hearts, and can explain it to yours. When repentance is described as sorrow of heart, as conviction of conscience, as brokenness and contrition of spirit, when we observe it so often expressing itself by

tears and sobs, or imperfectly cloaking its feelings beneath a sad and thoughtful countenance, it may seem to many to be an exercise of purest wretchedness. And yet, if I mistake not, it creates a delight which many a Christian has endeavoured to reproduce in order to give pungency and force to his subsequent experience. In the act of penitence there are combined certain motions of the heart and mind, each of which confers a separate pleasure. In the very convictions of our conscience there is the satisfaction of discovered truth.

We have hitherto lived under the delusion of an ignorance of the most fatal sort. We have been blind to some of the first and highest truths of moral obligation. We have been unmindful of God, and thoughtless of eternity, and carelessly ignorant of ourselves. And when our minds are awakened to the survey of this circle of truths, whatever alarm they may excite, there is yet a deep and thoughtful satisfaction that our delusion is broken up. There is a conscious elevation of mind in discoursing with these mighty themes, that beggars the importance of our other knowledge. We seem to have been ushered into a new world of thought, and its momentous subjects engross the spirit. We stand before the throne of God, we listen to the utterance of his mind, our own

souls expand themselves to our contemplation till we are amazed and overwhelmed at the vastness of their destiny. Sin in its essential evil, God in his essential righteousness, are revealed so overpoweringly, that while we bow down and cry, "Unclean, unclean, God be merciful to me a sinner!" we would not exchange the triumph of that discovery for the highest bliss that could be purchased by its ignorance. Our repentance has taught us a love that human philosophy cannot fathom. I will add to this satisfaction the sweetness of sorrow for our wrong doing, joined with the pleasantness of reconciliation. Have you never known in an inferior way the joy of which I speak? Have you never been alienated from a friend, when some mutual misunderstanding has given mutual offence? While the hard feelings of your nature were uppermost, you had no sweet pathos of emotion. But when your pride was quelled, and your resentment turned aside, and you made the noble resolution of apology, how the ice of your heart was thawed! The very purpose of reconciliation had a subduing joy, and when the friends met in mutual amity again, there was a gushing of tenderness which to its generous spirit is one of the most genial delights. And thus it is with a repentant sinner turning to his God and Saviour. The

very purpose of repentance has melted down his soul, which was hard and unbending till he resolved to confess his sins. And now, in the mellowness of his emotions, you see him kneeling with tears and sobs in private communion with God. He confesses all—he lays bare his very heart. He takes a noble and generous satisfaction in doing justice to his injured friend and Saviour. He loves to avenge his honour, even at the expense of his own cherished sins. He has the peaceful consciousness that every root of bitterness is cast out. Though he knows not if he shall be forgiven, he makes no condition. He is reconciled, though God be not—he will submit himself to his righteous decision. In the warm tide of these feelings his soul is dissolved; he is filled with the extasy of utter self-conquest and submission to God. As you look curiously and coldly on, you might suppose that his heart was a fountain of unmixed wretchedness. The tears, the sobs, the spasms of emotion, might seem to betray an inward woe; but you would misjudge him. He was never oppressed with such a weight of bliss before. He is righting, as far as he can, all the wrongs he has ever inflicted upon his God—he can do no more. This is his joy, and earth has no feeling to match the pathos of its delight, and if heaven be only like this he will be satis-

fied. It is the joy which at that very moment thrills through heaven, and bursts forth from angel tongues in a new hallelujah over one sinner that has repented. A child of glory has been born of that travail, and this is the bliss of his immortality begun with his repentance.

Fifthly, Let me add a concluding reason why repentance may be regarded as a privilege, viz: because it terminates in everlasting salvation—it is repentance unto life. The bliss of immortality begins with it in time. It is true indeed that immortality, unlike this mortal state, will have no sin, and therefore no new repentance. But immortality is only the fruit of which repentance is the seed. Heaven is a consecrated heart matured in piety. Heaven is a dedication to God confirmed by practice. Heaven is the hatred and avoidance of sin, begun in humiliation but finished in glory. Holy affections, just germinating on earth, but nipped by many an untimely chill, and broken by many an unfriendly temptation, now become firm in the presence of God and clinging to his throne—a new nature born of repentance, grown up to a seraphic manhood; in a word, a trembling child of sin exalted to be a king and priest in the celestial temple, and only a younger brother of Jesus Christ.

Heaven's knowledge is the perfecting of that



first insight of Divinity which repentance inspired. The communion of glory is the prolonging of that intercourse between the sinner and his Saviour, which was first established when he first repented. The rapture of bliss is only the immortal expansion of that first throb of sweet contrition. The everlasting gratitude of redemption began in the closet, and the everlasting song of free grace was learned upon his knees at the cross. Such is the value of repentance in preparing us for glory. Repentance is with us in our meditations, in our prayers, in our praise. It is endeared to us by all the joys and sorrows of Christian experience; it is the companion of our pilgrimage, and the handmaid of our salvation; it watches over our dying bed, our latest friend. We leave it behind at the gate of heaven, never to meet again. It returns to guide other wanderers, and we enter upon the life which repentance opened to our souls. And, in the words of Rowland Hill, "If we may be permitted to drop one tear, as we enter the portals of glory, it will be at taking an eternal leave of that beloved and profitable companion—Repentance."

My friends, the time is coming to each one of us, when the assurance that we have exercised a true repentance will be a better consolation than the world can supply besides. The consciousness

of a heart broken for its sins, and surrendered to Christ, will give you a peace so solid that not the waves of death nor the storms of judgment can shake it. It shall be your staff in the dark valley, and your victory over all foes, and your everlasting privilege and joy.

Christians! let me beseech you then to lay the foundation sure. Christians! let us refresh our religion by doing our first works. My hearers, one and all, begin in your closets to-night the saving work. Let there be a sabbath joy among the angels of heaven, giving new glory to God, that he hath granted to this congregation the repentance which is unto life.

## SERMON VII.

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### RUTH'S DECISION.

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Ruth i. 16, 17.

“WHITHER THOU GOEST, I WILL GO; AND WHERE THOU LODGEST, I WILL LODGE: THY PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE, AND THY GOD MY GOD. WHERE THOU DIEST, I WILL DIE, AND THERE WILL I BE BURIED. THE LORD DO SO TO ME, AND MORE ALSO, IF AUGHT BUT DEATH PART THEE AND ME.”

To a superficial reader of the Bible, the book of Ruth might seem a foreign and useless narrative. But when its connection with the other sacred history is understood, the reason of its introduction is both apparent and satisfactory. As the memoir alone of a single-hearted woman, in whom the gentle affections of her sex were strong and uppermost, it might win a romantic regard; but from its association, it inspires an interest of a sacred sort. The heroine of the story was a personage of high note, as well as of lovely character. She might be called, by excellence, a mother in Israel, because in her is found the parentage of that line of David, whose last and

glorious issue was the Redeemer of men. Through his long line of human ancestry, Jesus of Nazareth might find an early mother in the gentle and affectionate Ruth. She was, you will recollect, of the daughters of Moab, an oblique descendant of the Patriarchal stock; but she had by marriage become connected with an Israelitish family. She was now the widow of a young Hebrew, who had died in the land of Moab; and whose mother, Naomi, was now about to leave her adopted country and return to Judea, in order to cast herself upon the hospitality of her kindred.

As Naomi entered upon this journey, she was accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth; the former being likewise in widowhood. They had travelled but a little way, when Naomi entreated her daughters-in-law to return to their home. She told them she could offer them no attractions in the little town of Bethlehem, amongst a plain and unsophisticated people, and she a desolate widow. The thought of parting with their widowed mother-in-law so affected the daughters, that they lifted up their voices and wept. They wept, yet their grief was not alike. Orpah thought of the pleasant Moab land; and the bond of old attractions was so strong, that she gave her mother a farewell kiss, and left her to pursue her journey as she might.

But Ruth clave unto her. Earnest-minded and true, she had given her mother her heart, and she determined to cast in her lot with Naomi, for weal or for woe; and when her mother said, "Behold thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods, return thou after thy sister-in-law," the affectionate daughter answered, "Entreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." And so the friendship of Ruth and Naomi became indissoluble.

I scarcely know a more touching record of simple, earnest love. Beautiful for its purity of sentiment, and strong in its devotion of purpose, we pause before the example of this young Moabitess, and feel subdued by more than admiration. Her tenderness captivates our love, while her self-oblivion fills us with the reverence for a superior nature. We see in her a rare blending of moral elements, the action and reaction of the gentle with the earnest, of warm affections and delicate sensibility with firmness of will. The strength of her affections was controlled by the

power of determination, and the energy of will, softened and refined by the warmth of heart. On the one hand, her benevolence could never degenerate into fondness, nor, on the other, could her firmness ever reach to an unfeeling obstinacy. She would be instinctively kind, without being weak, and quickly sympathetic, without being inconstant. These are the prevailing elements of a character, at once lovely and efficient; fitted best for the mellow joys of the domestic sphere, but not incompetent to the daring of a heroine, and rising, on occasion, to a true majesty.

Contrast this character a moment with that of the other daughter. Orpah was a more common person. She had sensibility, but not deep-laid affection. The fountain of feeling could be easily unlocked, but it was quickly exhausted. An infirmity of will, joined to a weakness of the affections, made her, at any moment, liable to be swayed and driven from her course. Because her resolves had no anchorage in her heart, they never rose to the dignity of principles, but left her only a character of mere impulsiveness, fitful and uncertain, and no more likely to be attracted towards the right at one moment, than liable to be driven impetuously to the wrong at the next. Tears could gush readily, but the feeling evaporated with tears. There was a quick sensibility

joined with essential cold-heartedness. Such is not the character for enterprize, or consistency, or courage, or endurance. Never look for self-sacrifice, or cross-bearing, or holy determination from such a character. It is too superficial. The soil is so shallow, that piety cannot strike its roots deeply, nor shoot thriftily, nor bear rich fruits, nor survive a drought. Orpah could weep upon the neck of her mother-in-law, and with a grief that seemed at the moment true and heartfelt. But when Naomi suggested the thought of her return, and the image of that fair land of her birth was drawn before her mind—its idol gods, its home scenes, its gay companions, its pleasures, all bright, though godless—the tide of pleasant remembrance was too strong for her affections, and she bade her mother a long and last farewell, and Orpah became again a Moabite. We do not know that they ever met again.

It was just the occasion for magnanimity. It was a crisis that would overpower a weak attachment and try the fibre of a strong one. That which would be destructive to the one, would be wholesome and invigorating discipline to the other. It was, at all events, the best occasion for the development of character, and Orpah yielded, but Ruth was firm. The trial was the same to her sister as to her. There were friends

in Moab, and pleasures, and gaieties, and idol gods—old attachments and tender remembrances. There was joy and wealth behind, and only loneliness and poverty before. But what were these—a land of strangers, a narrow home, the forsaking of kindred, and the denial of ungodliness and worldly lusts—what were all these to the power of a love stronger than death? Naomi was her mother, and Ruth loved her. She loved her character—she loved her society—she loved her God—and she knew she should love her people and kindred; and the struggle seems, in her mind, to have been rather against Naomi's entreaties, than the blandishments of her former home. She could resist all these, with the example of her sister besides; and so she clave to Naomi and her fortunes, for life or death.

I presume you have already anticipated our application of this story; it illustrates so aptly the process and feelings of those who are just turning to God. The starting point, the motives, the sacrifices, the aim and destination of the Christian, are all represented by the narrative we have reviewed. The children of God are journeying from Moab to Bethlehem. The one place is the home of the soul, where God dwells and his people serve him—the land of promise and of final peace. And Moab is the ungodly world,



into whose customs, society and pleasures we were all born; a land of many idols and sinful pursuits, though of sweet and intoxicating pleasures. It has its rich scenes, its entertaining companions, its exhilarating moments and passages of life. But Moab was always hostile to the true God, and his true people. It was by means of the daughters of this land, that Balaam betrayed the Israelites into idolatry. It was this people who refused them permission to pass through the land, on their pilgrimage to Canaan; and God denounced upon them, in after years, many sore punishments. There is peculiar force, therefore, in the analogy, which brings the world into comparison with Moab.

For is not the Christian a stranger and pilgrim here? If he will live godly in Christ Jesus, does he not suffer persecution?—if not by open violence, yet by the unholy persuasions, the unfeeling reproaches, the offensive criticism, the averted look and sneer of them who know not God. Does not his heart bleed to hear the name of his Master dishonoured and blasphemed, and are not the people of the land given to the service and worship of idols—pleasure or ambition, or the lust of money? All of us, brethren, have passed some years in this idolatrous land. But if you have listened to the Divine call of bereavement,

or poverty, or friendlessness, or inward dissatisfaction with yourselves, or any other summons, then you have taken up your journey and set your faces towards Bethlehem. You have left behind you in the world many beloved friends, husbands or wives, parents or children, who refused to follow you in the unpromising journey. Perhaps they were almost determined to cast in their lot with yours. At least they must have had some relentings of nature—some inward misgivings at the thought of a separation that might be eternal. It is true, you are personally with them yet; but in heart, and spirit, and purpose, and destiny, you are very far asunder, and travelling fast away from the land where they love to find their portion. Weep for them, brethren; pray for them, as you love their salvation; but turn not back after them, as you love your own.

Again, from this instance of the narrative, we may understand the exercises of a mind just entering on a course of piety. It is evident that there was in the mind of each of these daughters of Naomi a distinct and simple act of choice. "Where thou goest, I will go," says the affectionate Ruth. All practical religion begins in an act of choice. I do not mean to impinge upon the doctrine of the Holy Spirit's agency in the renewal of the soul. The minister of Christ is

contented and thankful to refer the glory of a soul's salvation to Divine grace alone. When he would gather up the flowers and fruits of grace, wheresoever found—whether in the large successes of the Gospel, or in the awakening and sanctifying of the individual man—whatsoever be their excellence and their worth, he would attribute nothing to human merit. He would twine all those graces of piety and salvation into a wreath of imperishable beauty, but not for the adornment of any human monument—not as a chaplet of honour to any human reputation. But he would move most humbly, on his knees, to the very footstool of Jehovah, and bow his head in lowliness to the earth, as he reached up and placed on the lowest step of the throne this trophy to sovereign grace; and the voice of his tremulous exultation should be, “Not unto us—not unto us—but unto thy name be the praise for evermore.” But the acknowledgment of one true doctrine does not conflict with the reception of another doctrine, equally true. And it is evident, from the most satisfactory proof, that all practical godliness begins in an act of choice. There may be most powerful awakenings, and urgent desires, and tears, and groans, and prayers; yet these all never brought grace and conversion to the soul of man, nor gave him

salvation in heaven. These may impel a sinner up to the very line of decision; and yet, with the strongest agony of conviction—with an entire rending of his spirit—he is not a Christian, until he oversteps that line, and plants his feet firmly on the side of godliness.

And this one step is his own. Hitherto he has been passive. In all the previous steps of the process he has been acted upon. His convictions were involuntary—his pains he could not help—his tears were made to flow by the violence of his pains. These are affections, not action; and for these he is not directly responsible. But the choice is his. The last determination is voluntary. He may hesitate, and waver, and balance the opposing considerations. He may stand poised for that last decision, for a longer or a shorter space. But these things have their termination. He decides at last, and that decision seals and fixes his destiny; and that decision is his own voluntary act. It is the all-powerful "*I will*," which bears him over the dividing line, and plants his feet in the promised land of grace. God helps him then. All heaven and all good beings are on his side. He has begun the journey to Bethlehem. "Where thou goest, I will go."

I wish I might impress this truth upon you,

for I believe the only reason why so many are in danger of losing their salvation, is because they have never determinately resolved to be saved. They have wasted their time and endangered their eternity, by vague regrets, and unavailing fears, and involuntary anxiety, and half-formed wishes, and untrusting prayers. But they have not summoned themselves to this stern enterprise of the will. They have shrunk from a decision; and are contented, like Orpah, to weep and lament for a while, and then they return to their companions and their gods. I think I know the violence of this mental struggle. I can understand the inward conflict that rages oftentimes in the bosom of a man, before he will surrender himself to his rightful Lord and Master; when the pride of intellect, and the pride of reputation, and the pride of wealth will lay their strong forces together, side by side, and conspire against God, and refuse to bow down at the mercy-seat and ask forgiveness. And so do fashionable tastes, and the love of dress, and the love of gayety, and the fear of being ridiculed, and the thought of sacrificing so much that is in the world, weave a silken band about the will; and the poor, weak young man or woman concludes he cannot sacrifice so much for eternity, and he prefers to resign his journey, and follows the

misguided daughter of Naomi back to the land of sin and doom.

But let not such a person dare to say anything of the matter, but only that he has refused the invitation of his God. When he had only to choose, in order to be saved, he chose wrong; and when, at the last, his injured Saviour looks upon him, with this reproach, "You would not come unto me, that you might have life," my dear friend, you will own it, you will own it, for you will be speechless.

Oh, that decision—that critical decision! One little act, the simplest act of the soul, yet pregnant with the whole complex of character and destiny. Begotten in a moment, but living through eternity. The verge line of salvation, or ruin. The single hair which holds an infinite weight. How unspeakable the value of a moment! The clock strikes once. If that should be the note of the sinner's doom, he is lost forever. But before the echo of that bell-note dies, it strikes again; and now that lost creature has seized the cross, decided for Christ, and is safe eternally. How long halt ye, my brethren? Decide now—and let me tell you the objects you should have in view in your decision.

"Thy people shall be my people, and *thy* God, *my* God." The foremost object of the sinner's

choice is God—to love him, serve him, be dedicated supremely to him, as the portion of his soul, his shield and exceeding great reward. That is the god of our souls, which our souls love most; to which we pay the highest practical regard; to which we refer our motives, and render our obedience; for which we make most sacrifices, and which constitutes the living, powerful centre of our affections. It may be ambition, or wealth, or any other form of worldliness. A wife shall perhaps control the husband's heart and command his faculties, and time, and life, installed in his heart as on a throne. Or a husband shall be the tyrant, who, by an influence direct or indirect, shall so overrule a woman's impulses and affections, that she shall live for him alone, as if he were God. Or, it may be a little child, who, in the narrow circle of his enjoyment, shall engross the parent's influence, and care, and means; and to those fond parents the little child is as a deity.

Diversify the view, and multiply the objects as you please, you will find in every worldly thing some quality of power, to which you will find among men an answering and devout worshipper. From a crown to a mineral, or a shell or a black letter page, you may extend the catalogue; and some one of these objects has so en-

grossed the minds and souls of men, as to blind them to their immortal interests, and even alike to their mortal. There is something which every man loves supremely. If it be nothing external to himself, then it is something within, and *himself* is his chief divinity.

Men must have a god—the great God has made them so. Now the world's sin is, that it has forsaken the one living and true God, and substituted the creature in his place. We need not unbury ancient monuments and temples to count the number of false deities. There never were so many idols shaped of wood and stone, as are enshrined in the bosoms of our Christianized men and women, in the power of some worldly passion and end. There never was such a Pantheon as the human heart. It is only in the little Bethlehem of God's Church, that you find a true and holy worship. The wide world besides is only a Moab of idolatry. Unconvertedness is idolatry.

Now the decision we have spoken of, has for its object the discarding of every idol from the heart, and the enthroning of God in his rightful seat—to control the feelings, direct the motives, and shape the character of the soul. It is the being swallowed up in him in love, to say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on



earth I desire besides thee." It is the engrossing of our wills in his, so that to do his will shall be both our meat and drink. It is to seek his favour as the highest good, and trust in him as the surest helper. In a word, it is to serve him with the whole heart—and to begin *now*.

I need not say a word of the advantages of that service. You yourselves, my brethren, acknowledge the superiority of his nature, the glory of his excellent goodness, and the lasting benefits of his love; that his favour is life, and his loving-kindness better than life. Such was the decision of Ruth—bringing her away from every false god, and committing her to the alone guidance of the true Jehovah.

Again: "Thy people shall be my people." The Christian is a member of a family—the household of Christ. He has entered amongst the general assembly of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven. He lives not for himself—he is one of a fraternity. And when he gave himself to his Master, he became a partner of those who have entered into the same service. They are a peculiar people. They have a new spirit, a common aim, a mutual sympathy. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in them all." They live like

brethren. They are pitiful, and courteous, and compassionate; striving only in kindness, and provoking one another only to good works. If one member suffer, all the members suffer with him. The brother of high degree exalteth not himself above him that is lowly; but in honour preferring one another, they bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. Their communion here is only a type of the heavenly. Their oneness of feeling an antepast of the everlasting fellowship of the Holy Ghost. "Blest is the tie that binds those hearts in Christian love." Happy community! elect of God and precious! Thrice happy in the governance of the Saviour of sinners, in the growing purity of your souls, and in your glorious hope of immortality! Break not that triple bond, dear brethren, for it is most holy. Profane not your calling, for it is to heaven. Think not of the broken friendships of Moab, because your people are God's; and when you made the great decision of salvation, you made yourself one of a fraternity which comprises not many mighty, not many learned, not many rich; but you chose them still, to be only their equal; to take the place of the lowest, and to go up to your home, and stand at heaven's door hand in hand with those who, here on earth, are as the offscouring of all things.

Once more, I call to your notice another feature in the decision of Ruth—one which brings her decision in forcible contrast to her sister's. It was a *final* decision. It embraced her whole coming life. When she forsook Moab, it was forever. When she made choice of God and his people, it was for life or death. "Where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried." Her sister had made a momentary determination that she too would follow the fortunes of Naomi. But she returned, and they saw her no more. We may illustrate, by this contrast, the difference between two modes of decision, which seems very slight at first, but terminates in the utmost separation.

It is possible, nay it is very easy, for one who is awakened to pursue the heavenly pilgrimage, to adopt only a partial decision, and so to defeat the whole end of salvation. He decides by way of experiment. He has heard that if he surrenders himself to Christ, he shall gain the security and peace which his spirit craves; and he comes to the mercy-seat and renders his formal submission to God. But if you could read his heart, you would mark there a spirit of reservation. He has not submitted himself unconditionally to God. In his own mind he has prescribed these terms of dedication—"Give me comfort, and

I will give my heart." It is as if he demanded the wages before he has wrought the labour. It is as if he were purely selfish—willing to forsake his pleasant sins, if he can find a pleasanter substitute, but refusing to renounce them till he has seized the other bliss; and determining to cling to them if that other bliss cannot soon be his. It is as if he were unwilling to rely in simplicity on the absolute word of God, and therefore demands a pledge in advance. Such a decision never carried a sinner to heaven.

Many have been the followers of Orpah in this false surrender to religion. You can see them roused in the church, when some shaft of truth transfixes the soul, and quivers in the wound. You can see them overwhelmed and bowed down with grief, as they stand at the tomb's door. You see them very thoughtful on the vanity of human life, when they have struggled against debt and poverty, and been conquered; and then you shall see them fly to religion for their comfort—solely for their own private ease, and not at all for pardon and the favour of God. Impulsive in its source, their decision will be most transient in its life. In the fickleness of superficial feeling, they throw off the oppressive grief in a flood of tears—and Orpah wends her way again to the wicked Moab.

The decision of Ruth was, and the decision of a true godliness always is, both unconditional and final. Nothing is reserved. The idols are not only left, but renounced. Moab is forsaken forever. The companions of sin are abandoned, and the everlasting interests of the soul—its attachments, faculties, attainments—the soul itself—the whole moral creature—cast away into the outspread arms of the soul's only Saviour. The sinner feels that his decision is his last; that his covenant cannot be retracted. If he perishes, he perishes; but he will perish in the path to heaven—his feet at the cross, his face towards the mercy seat. I said, but just now, "Oh! that critical decision!" Can we help saying now, "Oh! that most glorious decision, which without reserve, without conditions—finally and forever—brings the sinner to the footstool and the soul to glory?" Angels mark that decision. God writes it in his book; and the new song swells forth louder, till the arches of heaven ring again, with the new joy, "He was dead, he is alive again. He was lost and is found."

My brethren, the decision of Ruth has been acted over again here many times. The meaning of the baptismal vow is, "Whither thou goest, I will go; where thou dwellest, I will dwell; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my

God. God do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." You have seen that solemn rite many times, and every time you witnessed it, it was as a tender appeal of your companions and friends, starting on their pilgrimage, and looking back, beckoning to you, "We are journeying to the place, of which the Lord said, I will give it you; come thou with us, and we will do thee good; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." They invite you still to go up with them out of the land of idolatry and sinful pleasure. They have joined the family of the Lord, and they have parted from you, to press on forever to glory. Dear friends, will you let them go without you? And will you return to the world to sin on? They have chosen God for their portion—Christ for their Saviour. Cannot their example move you? Have not they tasted of the pleasures of the world, and traversed the pleasant places of sin? Yet they have left them all behind. They have found a better land, even a heavenly. Are not your souls as precious as theirs? Will not heaven be as delightful to you as to them? Can you afford any better than they to trifle with your eternity? Will you let them depart without crying out after them, "We will go with you, for we have heard that the Lord is with you." Where you go, so

will we—your people shall be our people; and your God ours. God do so, and more also, if aught but death part you and us.

Dear friends—one and all—remember that the spiritual separation which takes place when any of you are regenerated, is only a type of that eternal parting which shall be at the judgment day. You may dwell together in person until then. You may live beneath the same roof—sit at the same table—occupy the same pew—die, one after another, on the same bed, and be laid in the same tomb. But when you rise again, you shall part forever. Parents and children—husbands and wives—loving and loved—shall part to meet no more. How awful will be that parting! Is there no feeling of desire to travel with them? Then do not, like Orpah, wish, and weep, and turn away, but cast in your lot with them, once and for all. Choose God for your God; his people, for your companions and friends; Christ, for your Saviour; his Spirit, for your guide; heaven, for your home.

## SERMON VIII.

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### HOLINESS ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION.

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Hebrews xii. 14.

“HOLINESS, WITHOUT WHICH NO MAN SHALL SEE THE LORD.”

WE are all in pursuit of one object. Our modes of life are different, our callings, our amusements, our means, our tastes—yet there is one aim universal to the race, and that is happiness. Men run to and fro, and seek out many inventions; and if you will hearken a moment to the voice of human activity and passion, coming forth day and night, from the thick multitude, it is only the everlasting cry, “Who will show us any good?” This is the root of human motives. Men do not love life more than they love enjoyment. Therefore it is that every man wishes to go to heaven. But what heaven would be, if it were to be shaped and shifted to suit the wishes of men’s hearts, you can judge perhaps better than I. Some persons would wish to carry there their riches, that they might count gold forever.



and some their honours, that the first here might be the first in heaven; and some their luxury, so that their present heaven might last always. Some are so lifted up with pride and contempt of their inferiors, that no bliss would suit them in which there was not an aristocracy; and are there not trifling men and women, who are so much the votaries of fashion and display, that if they could enter into the courts of God, their chief admiration and delight would be spent upon the beautiful garments of their immortality? Now, since all we can know of the future life must be a matter of revelation, it behoves us to inquire, what has God spoken of eternity? Is there an immortal felicity? Can that felicity be attained? On what conditions? Through what means? This question, which expresses the pleading desires of the human soul, God has definitely answered. Life and immortality have been brought to light through the gospel. There is a heaven, comprising as its ingredients, glory, honour, immortality, and inward peace and rest. It was meant for the human soul, and the human soul for it. But it is accessible only through one highway. In the prophet's words, "A highway shall be there and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but the

redeemed shall walk there." If the question be, What is the personal qualification that shall make me meet for heaven? I answer with the apostle, "Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord." You will have inferred already, that our subject is "Holiness essential to salvation."

Let us endeavour, therefore, to analyze and discover the true nature of holiness. Holiness, in the abstract, is conformity to moral right. When, in ordinary speech, we ascribe holiness to God, we mean to denote that matchless purity of his nature that makes him always and inflexibly just, and righteous, and true. So that whatever proceeds from him, is the best that is conceivable. Whatever he does, is right. Whatever he speaks, is everlasting truth. Whatever he wills, is dictated by the impulses of a transcendent excellence. Whatever his bosom loves, is the superlative of moral fitness. Whatever plan his mind conceives, is sure to be accordant with the highest interests of the universe, so that it may be said, with an infinite emphasis, that God is holy. And more than this is true, for not only is the Almighty holy, but he is holiness itself. He is the embodying of that quality. In his nature the abstract idea is rendered substantial. The conception is made alive. And because God is the living substance of holiness, he

is fit to be our pattern. Because he is essential perfection, his will is our rule of holiness. If we had minds of an infinite grasp, we might make our own laws; for we could then determine the bounds of abstract fitness, and each one of us would be a God to himself. But inasmuch as we are subordinate creatures, and can by no means understand all the relations of things, we must reckon ourselves as under tuition. We must have a schoolmaster to train our infant powers, and hold before our eyes the pattern and the rule of holiness. The pattern, I have said, is God himself, the rule is the teachings of God. Holiness in the created being therefore, holiness in men, consists in conformity to God—our character conformed to God's character, our doings conformed to God's revealed will. This is, I think, the most intelligible description of holiness—conformity to God's revealed will. To determine the particular developments of human holiness, we must review the particular revelations of God's will. Holiness will consist in conformity to them. God has revealed his will to mankind, both in the law and in the gospel. The law is the rule of outward and inward morality. The gospel teaches us how to obey that rule, by inspiring us with sufficient motives and constraining desires. The law is the rule for sinless be-

ings, and presupposes a sinless nature. You have only to show to a sinless being the way to do right, and he is already furnished with the affections and desires that make his soul press on after holiness and God. The law of God is therefore the rule of holiness to angels, and the winged cherubim, and all beatified spirits in heaven. It was Adam's rule before he fell. It will be the universal rule and guide of the millennium, when no man shall be obliged to say to his brother, "Know the Lord, for all shall know him, from the least to the greatest."

But the law of God is not an available rule for sinners, because sinners have no heart to obey it. It is still binding, indeed; for to suppose otherwise, would be to suppose that God can have two contradictory wills on the same subject. It is binding upon the sinner in its precept, for the sinner ought to obey it. It is binding upon him in its penalty, for the sinner will be destroyed if he disobeys it. The law has for the sinner, if we may speak so, only a monumental efficacy. It is the standard of moral perfection, just as the temple of Theseus is the model of classic architecture, just as the Belvidere Apollo is the mould of animal beauty, but it is only cold marble after all. The law has no life-giving power. It declares what we ought to do and to be, but it

leaves us as it finds us, in all the impotency of conscious and inborn unholiness. Men might have gazed forever at the standard of Divine purity, revealed in the law of God, but, because they had lost the impulse and sympathy of holiness, the standard would only have disheartened them. A holy being would find all his desires drawn out in contemplating the law of God, and every feeling warmed as when one basks in the sunlight.

But show the pattern of purity to the fallen soul and it trembles, just as you might suppose an arctic sailor to grow more chilly at the bright splendour of an iceberg. But you need not be told, my hearers, that God has not abandoned us to the frigid requirements of the law. When he foresaw that men would fall, he knew there must be something devised, not simply to show them how a holy being ought to act, but how a sinful creature might become holy. And therefore he provided a way by which fallen man might be restored, and his decayed holiness renewed. God willed again, and the gospel came down to us a standard of duty for fallen men, a rule of action for sinners, a pattern of holiness shining in the face of Jesus Christ the Saviour, God manifested in the flesh. The first step of conformity to God's will, which the sinner can

take, is to receive the gospel with all his heart. He has nothing to do with the law as a means of salvation, because he has already violated it a thousand times, a thousand times told. The first duty the gospel enjoins is a duty which the law never recognized—repentance for sin. The second principle of holiness, as taught by the gospel, is faith in a Saviour who died as a substitute for sinners. This is evangelical holiness. No person ever cordially acquiesced in these terms without thereby being conformed to God. By his repentance the sinner abjures and loathes iniquity. He sees it to be that abominable wrong which brings death and ruin into the world. He declares war against it as the enemy of his soul, and so he stands on the same platform with all holy beings, and is at once enlisted into the ranks of heaven's own army.

There is joy with the angels of God, because Divine grace has won a fresh trophy, and the Divine holiness secured a new ally. Moreover, in the act of repentance, the sinner virtually acknowledges the righteousness of God in another way. He subscribes, as it were, the sentence of his own condemnation, so that the fearful penalty of the Divine law seems no more than he deserves, and therein he sets his seal that God is right and he in the wrong. Strange transformation!

Wonderful revolution of feeling! That law, which once seemed so full of terror, whose intolerable precepts seemed almost like lightning to scathe his sight, and whose heavy penalties seemed to roll and burst about him like the sound of near thunder, when the lightning strikes its object; that holy law is the penitent sinner's admiration. Its vivid precepts seem like purifying beams from God. Its tremendous retributions utter the voice of heaven's glorious holiness. The sinning man is stricken down, but he cannot say it is not all right. The law offers no hope to the repentant, but he cannot help repenting, and though the bolt may fall upon him next, he knows he deserves the worst. In such a mood of contrition and self-abasement, the sinner is prepared for the cordial reception of a Saviour; knowing that he has no righteousness of his own, he is compelled to look about for a shelter beneath another's merits. In a word, he feels his need of a Saviour; and when he reads in the gospel the proclamation of redeeming love, he no longer slights it, for its mercy is just what he needs to raise him from the dust.

When he understands that the reason of God sending his Son, was that he might be just and justify the ungodly, he seems to have acquired a new perception, and cries out, Oh! the depth,

the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God. He sees how mercy and truth met together in Christ, how righteousness and peace embraced each other at the cross. When he reads in the evangelists that the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost, his heart cries out, "Lord, save me, or I perish;" and when he learns from the apostle that the saying is worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, he refuses no longer. He embraces the Saviour as his, determined that, henceforward, nothing shall separate him from the love of Christ. You behold the sinner now in the second step of evangelical holiness. With a heart changed from the love of sin to the love of the Saviour, he has become conformed to God. There is now a principle in the centre of his being, which is the mother of all holy excellencies and all pious affections. His soul is penetrated with a new life, so that all the out-goings of his character shall be different from their former course. He is holy in heart, and he will be holy in his walk and conversation. He is on the footing of those holy beings to whom, I just now said, the law is an available and proper rule. The gospel has furnished him with a supply of motives and affections to obey the law. Because God so loved him as to surrender his own Son in his



stead, he sends back an answering love to heaven, a love that engrosses his soul, and heart, and might, and mind, and obedience becomes his meat and his drink. This is a matter I wish to enforce with peculiar emphasis, because it is often misrepresented by the enemies of the gospel, and apparently misunderstood by some who are its professed disciples. I mean the connection of evangelical piety with living and practical obedience. Does it countenance sin to say that it is freely forgiven at the cross? Does it represent the Almighty as winking at disobedience to proclaim that there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus? It is a favourite device of Satan to say so; when he has exhausted his resources, and worn out his ingenuity to keep the sinner from being a Christian, his next endeavour will be to make him a false Christian.

He would as lieve pluck his victims from the threshold of heaven, as to lead them under his own proper banners to their darkness and chains. He sometimes clothes himself as an angel of light, and holds out to the awakened person the lure of a false hope, and satisfies him with an imperfect religious experience, and whispers, "Peace, peace," when true peace there is none to him; because he has not renounced his sins and himself, and has trusted to Jesus Christ to save

him, not from sinning but from dying. Can one stand as a watchman on the walls of Zion, demanding the countersign of all who pass in and out before him? Can the pastor be familiar with the character and conduct of the members of the Church's flock, and marking this one's indifference and the indolence of another, listening to the ill-natured cavillings of a third, hearing how loudly some can profess and seeing how little they do, never denying themselves, never taking up the cross, willing that Christ's cause should flourish and prosper if others will sustain it, but scarcely stretching forth a finger to aid it, expending much for self-indulgence, and giving only a beggar's mite for Christ and charity, of all debts satisfying the Church's debt last, or not at all; can he see it and not admit that all are not Israel who are of Israel?

But conceding the fact then, that many Christians may be false, it does not follow that they profess a false Gospel. It is not the less infallibly sure that a sincere repentance and a living faith will, as St. John speaks, purify the heart and overcome the world, that they are the true beginning of religion for a sinner, the sure precursors of a holy life. God has forefended the vicious conclusion we argue against in the words of our text. A sweet fountain can send forth

bitter waters as well and as naturally as a converted heart will love and pursue unholiness. You may recognize a Christian by his fruits as surely as you may understand that you cannot gather grapes from the bramble-bush, or figs from thistles. The Gospel never justifies a soul which it does not sanctify, and the pardon of sin is the parent of a holy life.

This is the truth, then, that I wish were engraven on every man's soul, viz: a cordial compliance with the Gospel and its simple terms of salvation, is not only not repugnant to practical holiness, not exclusive of a pure heart and life, but is the only source of godliness. The song of free grace only awakens affection for its author. Salvation without price is the amazing thought that fills the soul with wonder, love, and praise. The stooping of God to become man to atone for sin, because sin could not be pardoned without an atonement, so overawes the soul with the impression of God's jealous purity, that the converted sinner dare not sin if he would, and when he remembers that the atoning being is his own dear Friend and Saviour, he would not sin if he dared. There is to his breast no reflection so cheering as that when he glories he must glory in the Lord, that the pride of the flesh must be abased, and that God must be all in all. There is implanted

in that breast the living germ of holiness, so that the child of the Gospel has a heart to sympathize with the angels, and with Christ, and with God, and whatever pleases them is most acceptable to him. It is not the servile consideration that he must be holy or die which influences his mind. It is not that he would prefer to sin, not even to retain a favourite sin, for sin is the object of his abomination. Self-denial is not a hardship, for the occasion to deny himself is only an opportunity to exercise and practise the love of Christ. Prayer will be delightful, for prayer will be communion with God. The outward duties and the inward graces will all find a place in the life and character of every instructed believer in Christ, for the spirit to be and to do all that becomes a child of God is a spirit that is begotten in him at the cross. A soul so conformed to God's will here is ready to join God in heaven. Come how and when the summons may, he can, with a full-hearted complacency, lay aside the robings of this life, business, friends, pleasures, riches, and step down with a manful courage into his grave, and dropping there the only remnant of his mortality, walk through the gate of death to hail his Redeemer, and feel entirely happy that he is like him, and can see him as he is. Death ushers him to a new place, but it indues him with

no new character. He enjoys God already. Whosoever is so imbued with this living power of holiness carries his heaven within him. There is not one of those exercises of the Christian at which we have glanced in this discourse, which is not like a well-spring of joy in his heart. Even in the mood that some might think the most sorrowful, he is happy, and his happiness is of the same grade, though not of such vast amount as that of heaven. Watch that penitent standing by the foot of the cross. His eye is turned up to the pierced and bleeding form extended there. There are tears in his eyes, there is sorrow graven on his countenance, his hands are clasped, and now and then you may see them pressed close together by a sort of spasm, and his lips move with an almost inarticulate sound. If you draw nearer, you can hear him say, "'Twas for my sins my dearest Lord hung on the cursed tree, and groaned away his dying life. For thee, my soul, for thee." Now those tears, that subdued look, and the strain of his language, might lead one to suppose he was unhappy, but never was there a wider mistaking of the fact. He considers himself at this moment one of the most favoured of beings. He has never been the subject of emotions so much like bliss as his present feelings; and if, with the charitable design of

drying up his tears and allaying his grief, you should take him by the hand to lead him away from that mournful tragedy he is contemplating, he would gaze upon you for an instant in surprise, withdraw his hand, and turn again to look into his Saviour's face. He has a "joy with which a stranger intermeddleth not." There is in his emotions a blending together of admiration, and reverence, and gratitude, and love, and hope, and humble views of himself, and noble resolves towards Christ, so that his whole conscious being is lost and swallowed up in God. You mistake the whole matter if you suppose that he is unhappy, or that you can mend his condition in the slightest measure. Now, if the sadness of a holy heart be so joyful, what must its exhilaration be? Less subduing, having less of the pathos of delight, but ravishing and ennobling still. And thus it is with his every day life. The affection becomes active. The principle is turned into practice, supreme love to God is in the heart, and its outgoing is holiness to the Lord. I have laboured thus far to exhibit the nature and the fruits of holiness in order to show how truly a holy person, a person conformed to God, may be said to be prepared for heaven. Let me endeavour, very briefly, to set in contrast to this the character of a man still in unholiness, and I think you

will perceive that holiness is not only a qualification for heaven, but the only qualification, so that the unholy person cannot of necessity be a partaker there.

Unholiness is the want of supreme love to God, and, as the consequence of this, a want of reconciledness to God's character and rule. It would be enough for some minds to leave the subject here, for the very definition suggests the idea of a thorough repugnance to the heaven where God dwells. But to guard against a possible delusion, let me illustrate the truth by sketching a character of which our own observation has furnished some originals. Passing by the profligate, the profane, the Sabbath-breaker, the intemperate, the miserly, as the class of unclean ones who, the prophet says, shall not pass along the highway to heaven; let us suppose a man of morals unimpeachable, of generous affections, lofty sentiments, and delicate perceptions of propriety. Add to these the decorations of winning social qualities, and high mental attainment and polish. Then scrutinize his deportment in religious matters; see him punctually at his place in the house of God, a liberal supporter of religious institutions, and oftentimes, so far outstripping, in this respect, many who call themselves Christians, that it ought to put them to the blush. Why is

not this man a candidate for the blessedness of God? is the question. And the answer is, "Because not any or all of these qualifications are of necessity equivalent to holiness." If there reside not in his heart one all-governing principle of love to God, and the entire surrender of his faculties and himself to do the will of God, he is yet unholy. Whatsoever be the actuating motives of his life, they spring from earth, not heaven; and therefore when you speak to him of seeing God, he does not understand the phrase. But, besides these qualities, we repeatedly observe in men who are not Christians, a sort of persuasion that they cherish a love for God. They have a general reverence for sacred things. They have been among the scenes of nature's terrible magnificence, and they thought they could adore and bow down in the presence of Omnipotence. They have made researches into nature's handicraft, and exclaimed at the wisdom of the Omniscient. They have often pointed out with admiration, the beneficence of God strewed over the universe, and specially manifested in giving prosperity to them. They feel they owe him their gratitude. They say they are grateful, and what more can you ask? Is not this a true and sufficient love of God? I answer, but yet not I, but God answers, "No." You can equally be made



to feel your inferiority at any display of power and magnificence, whether ye suppose it to be natural or divine. You are inspired with a sort of reverence in beholding Niagara, whether ye believe its bed was dug by virtue of an inanimate law, or by the finger of Jehovah. You feel belittled when tracing the intricacies of nature's works, whether the wisdom that appears in them be the fruit of the Divine mind or of a lucky chance. At best it is only a natural attribute that you admire.

And so your eyes may be suffused at the thought of your blessings, whether you ascribe the credit of them to God, or to the inevitable tide in the affairs of men. But allowing after all it is the Deity himself who is loved, that Deity is not the Jehovah of the Bible. It is easy to array the character of God with a tissue of imaginary qualities, and then to bow down to the idol our fancies have shaped. There is one attribute of Jehovah, which the unrenewed man never loves. It is Jehovah's choicest attribute. He glories in it more than in all the rest. It is his bright and stainless holiness, his hatred of sin, his solemn and everlasting determination to punish and destroy sin. No human creature could ever bring himself to love and praise God for his holiness, until he had felt the evil of sin,

and learned to loathe it in himself first of all. Is it natural or possible for a being who loves himself best, to cherish an affection for the pure God, when he is told there is something in his character which God detests? This is not the law of human sympathy and correspondence, and to say to such an one that his character as a sinner is hateful to God, is to arm his feelings with a triple mail of opposition. Sin must first be crucified and nailed to the cross, as an accursed thing, by the sinner himself, before he can even understand the glory of Jehovah's purity. How then is he prepared to enjoy the true God? Transplant such a person within the walls of heaven, with his nature unchanged. Let him breathe that atmosphere that has no taint of sin. Let him see every object graven with holiness, where the very light by which the soul sees, is the light of moral purity. Let him hear the music that swells forth always; the burden of whose chorus is, "Praise God in his holiness." Let him behold the army of the redeemed come marching up in their white robes of sinlessness, and cast their crowns at Jehovah's feet, and cry out with one loud peal of adoration, "Thou art worthy, for thou only art holy. Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." The man of elegant but unsanctified character could not love it. It would wake up no response

within him. This is not the God he thought he loved. That purity is intolerable to his sight. That music is discord to his soul. "Let me escape," he cries, "I have seen God. He is not the God that I imagined I loved, for he is a sin-hating God. Heaven is not the blessedness I used to dream of. My eternity is undone. I must go away among my kindred, the unholy; but give me wings, let me fly quick over these high walls, for every moment is wretchedness until I can reach the place where sin is not abhorred. Away, then, away from this intolerable and eternal tide of praise." And away from the face of God he flies, and never enters heaven again. "Without holiness, no man can see the Lord."

## SERMON IX.

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### ADORNMENTS OF THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER.

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Philippians iv. 8.

“FINALLY, BRETHREN, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE TRUE, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE HONEST, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE JUST, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE PURE, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE LOVELY, WHATSOEVER THINGS ARE OF GOOD REPORT; IF THERE BE ANY VIRTUE, AND IF THERE BE ANY PRAISE, THINK ON THESE THINGS.”

CHRISTIAN piety is not only an inward but an outward grace. It is not only a life, but an ornament. It is spiritual, and it is practical besides. It is an old and stereotyped charge against the doctrines called evangelical, that they make a man's salvation depend so much upon his faith, as quite to obscure and shut out the duties of an everyday religion. This complaint has somewhat of plausibility, but it proceeds on a false view both of theology and of human nature. It is false theology to say that justification by faith excludes the duties of an outward godliness, because faith is itself the root of every pious virtue. And it

is a false view of human nature, because when once the inward man is renewed by faith in Christ, the outward man is sure to exhibit a renovation of life, of morals, and of manners. There is no inconsistency then in exhorting a congregation of Christian believers, who ascribe their great spiritual change to the mere grace of God, to adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour, by adding to their characters one by one the whole catalogue of moral and social beauties. It is just as natural and just as necessary that the Christian should practise good works, as it would be if he expected to be saved by his own merits, instead of those of his Redeemer. No Christian teacher ever exhibited, with such clearness and emphasis, the nature of faith as the single ground of justification, as the great apostle, whose words are our text. And no one ever set forth as he did, with such breadth of view, the indispensable character of all good works as the condition of our advancement, and of our fitness for heaven. The text itself is an illustration in point. Addressing those who seem to have been most exemplary in their adhesion to the faith of the gospel, he now exhorts them to be diligent and pains-taking in exhibiting the pattern of moral virtues wrought into their outward lives. In discoursing from these words of the apostle, there

can be no better order of thought than the one he has chosen, and in following this we have only to define the character of the various virtues which he enumerates in succession.

First, "Whatsoever things are true," he says, "think on these things"—think on them, that is, to practise them. By the "things that are true," we may understand whatsoever has its basis in the revealed word of God, i. e. doctrinal truth; or again, it may signify that which is grounded in truthfulness of character, i. e. practical sincerity, simplicity of purpose, transparency of motive, genuineness of principle as opposed to double dealing, hypocrisy, or the left-handedness of expediency. If we regard it in the former of these senses, then it is an admonition to hold fast to the great truths of the gospel; to keep them in familiar view as living truths; to make them the man of our counsel, a light to our feet, and a lamp to our path; to bring near to our minds the realities of an atoning cross, an interceding Saviour, an influential and present Spirit, a judgment bar, and an eternity beyond of ineffable brightness or unutterable gloom; to make these things felt and realized as principles of action, and so to bring the heart under the influence of nobler and sublimer impressions than can be drawn from anything sublunary. The effect of this would be

to turn our common life into a life of faith, looking at the things that are unseen and eternal. It would reduce to their true inferiority, the cares and griefs, as well as the enjoyments, of the world; so that we should endure as seeing Him who is invisible; we should weep as though we wept not, and rejoice as though we rejoiced not; we should be anxiously careful for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, together with thanksgiving, we should make known our requests unto God, and the peace of God which passeth understanding would keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. Such would be the effect of due reflection upon the revealed truths of the gospel.

But if by the words "whatsoever things are true," we understand the apostle to signify the traits which spring from sincerity or truthfulness of character, which is the more probable supposition, then we are introduced to a class of qualities more plain and tangible, though not more real or essential. Think, then, he says, upon the graces of a sincere disposition. They are, in fact, worthy to be thought of, if only for their rarity. And in saying so, I mean no broad satire upon human society, but only truth and soberness. For it is indeed quite remarkable how, of all human foibles, the want of sincerity appears

historically to be the most common and frequent. It is remarkable how the conscience may be educated to practise many duties with a religious scrupulousness, and to pass by, at the same time, some of the plainest requirements of truth between man and man. From the earliest records of even sacred history, we learn how common was mutual deception, and how, with many traits of a better sort, there was mingled the want of honest and truthful speech. The whole type of oriental morality, indeed, seems to be defective in this. Passionateness and imagination had so much to do in forming the oriental piety, as to throw quite into the background the common sensible virtue of veracity. Hence, even among the fathers of the primitive church, there seems to have been often a tolerance, if not a practice, of deception, which a truthful spirit must repudiate and condemn. The very fervour of their religious zeal carried them beyond the bounds of ethical propriety. They learned to think that the end sanctified the means, that fraud was no sin if it were pious, and that a false miracle was made divinely true, if it were successful in making converts to the truth. But this unworthy trait was not confined to the early ages. The lying spirit is not an oriental demon alone. Although it took a more easy form, and found a



more natural home in the unreasoning and imaginative constitution of an eastern people, yet, wherever religion is one sided, and devotion outgrows morality, men will tell lies for their religion, which they would scruple to utter for an inferior object. Wherever the imagination enters too largely into piety, or rather where religion is a matter either of mere sentiment and taste, or of plain flat bigotry, there is involved, in either form, so much of passion and propensity, as to overpower the conscience, and to warp the whole perception of moral right. Whether it be the eastern or the western mind, it is all the same. The spirit of Jesuitism, though its measures may be more dangerous when systematized by rule and adopted by a fraternity, is not less unhal- lowed, when you find it joined with an evangel- ical faith and an American character. It is the same old Satan transforming himself again into an angel of light, for the poisoning of the faith, and the destruction of the saints. But even where religion is not the object, the spirit of in- sincerity may be traced in the common forms of Christian society. Many of the maxims of poli- tics, many of the practices of mercantile life, many of the rules of professional conduct, many of the laws of politeness and good breeding, even among Christian people, are based upon in-

sincerity, deception and mere policy. They are all alike opposed to the simplicity and truthfulness of character, which is commended by the apostle to our Christian thoughts. It is the more strange that this spirit of untruth should hold such sway in the religious forms of society, when we remember that our God has declared himself pre-eminently a God of truth, and that in proportion to the dignity and lustre of this attribute, must be his hatred of whatsoever loveth or maketh a lie. To his immaculate truthfulness it would seem there could be nothing more odious than deception, and not without a reason that is level to our own understanding. For sincerity is the basis of all noble and manly traits. It is the heroism of humanity, approaching more nearly the god-like than any other quality. It is the root of all courage and earnestness in religious enterprize, at the same time that it is no less the life of private devotion. It imparts to confession all its generosity and dignity, to repentance all its renovating power, to faith its whole-hearted confidence, and to prayer and praise all their acceptableness to God. And, in our human relations, it is the basis of all honest dealing between man and man, rising above law, and above custom, and above prejudice, and interest, and fear. As it is Satan's opposite, so it is his

most powerful antagonist. If he can only deceive us, or what is still better for him, make us deceive ourselves and others, then he is content. He has gained a new ally. He may fold his arms and sit aloof, and smile a sardonic smile, while his bosom boils with triumph against God and his grace, at the self-destruction of his saints. There is need of greater conscientiousness among Christian people, touching all the modes of direct and indirect deception. There is wanting a more powerful infusion of sincerity into the habits of society, and the private treatment by Christians of each other. Of all faults, the want of this is most radical and dangerous. Of all virtues, none is more lustrous and celestial. Whatsoever things are true, then let us think of these things.

Again, says the apostle, "Whatsoever things are honest," think of these. By the word honest, we are to understand, not what is commonly denoted by that word, fairness of dealing; but, as it is translated elsewhere, a gravity of manner, a reverend demeanour, a sound speech which cannot be condemned. Whatsoever then may be the appropriate manifestation of such high hopes and noble longings as are the Christian's privileged feelings, whatsoever is becoming in manner and conversation, in one who has an immortal birthright glowing like light before him, to

which he aspires with an enthusiasm that grasps every faculty, fastens every ambition, and nourishes every love; whatsoever is befitting the behaviour of one whose familiar friend and companion is Jesus Christ the Lord, think of it, says the apostle. Let such demeanour be yours.

When Moses came down from the mountain, there lingered upon his unconscious face the reflected light of the Divine majesty. He needed not to say that he had communed with God. The clinging radiance betrayed him. His presence beamed with the reverend glory, and they who saw him, saw him so changed that they would have veiled his countenance as if he were the insufferable Divinity itself. True godliness is a manifesting power. It must show itself. Among the various circumstances of social life, there will be some which bring out the true Christian almost in spite of himself.

I do not mean to say that he who appears to be a Christian is always truly such, for even the fine gold may be counterfeited in colour, in splendour, in weight; and the counterfeit, while it is undetected, will be as useful currency, and buy as much as the true coin. But I simply mean, that though gold may be counterfeited, it cannot be thoroughly disguised. Its colour will be clearer on inspection, its brightness will shine more by

attrition, and its solid ring will resound from the pavement the harder it is tried. So the true Christian, in proportion as he is true, will seem to be such.

The sober earnestness of a heart converted from frivolity to solemn realizations, of a spirit profoundly peaceful, reposing in Jehovah's arms, of a temper changed from gross and carnal to angelic, and of desires and affections binding his heart like chains to the throne of God his Saviour. Such a sober earnestness, not morose, but calm, not dull and uncheerful, but still not wildly gay, will be the habitual temper and manifestation of the true Christian. Others will take knowledge of him, that he has been with Jesus. There will go forth from his very silent presence a restraint upon ungodliness. A gentle and reverend light will betoken him. He will be felt in society, beneficially and thankfully felt, even by the thoughtless and desperate.

This is the living epistle of which St. Paul speaks, known and read of all men. It constrains the regard of men, and makes them reverence the Gospel. It is a powerful mode of influence, and, let me add, one of the easiest, as it is the most appropriate. Whatsoever things then are reverend, grave and seemly in a child of God, oh! think of them, and make them

yours. Let your manner be sober, your deportment serious, your conversation rational and edifying, that your friends may feel, when you have been with them, that they have breathed the odour of a better life.

Again, "Whatsoever things are just, think on these things." Here is an exhortation to simple fairness and integrity among men. This is one of the elementary rules of moral philosophy, not grafted upon the gospel, but springing out of it, and showing that, rightly understood, religion and morality are of the same stock. Be just in your dealings with mankind. Be no respecter of persons. Do not cringe to wealth, and state, and power, and tyrannize over poverty and misfortune. Remember that the vilest offcast whom society has ever branded, has a claim upon the most virtuous for sympathy and help; not the claim of mercy, which you may hear at a lofty distance and stoop as by a condescension to answer, but the claim of absolute and imperative justice as your brother or sister in human nature, which you are bound to listen to—standing on their level, in contact with them—to hear their case, to supply their need, to right their wrong. Justice is a pagan virtue indeed, but so it is a Christian; and it is both pagan and Christian, because it is a human duty, a universal duty, a

perpetual duty. Do not think you can be unjust and be a Christian too. And remember that justice is not measured always by human laws. They are narrow, local, changeable. They sometimes make right wrong, and wrong right. The law may wink at many an unfair dealing, which God will not away with. You may defraud a creditor, or grind the face of the poor, or make gain out of a friend's misfortune, instead of relieving it, and all the while no human statute shall be able to grasp that felony of the heart. But oh! to God's bar let the unfortunate one appeal, and you are defaulted. There is the true appeal. There rises, in pure glory, the eternal standard of rectitude by which you must be judged, by which you should judge. Justice is higher than law. It is commensurate with mercy. Human mercy is only justice. "Whatsoever things are just, then think on these things."

Again, "Whatsoever things are pure, think on these." By purity we may understand freedom from those carnal lusts and appetites which make a sensualist. It is an exhortation to spiritual-mindedness. In a soft and sensual age, Christianity had a mission of no easy accomplishment. Less sensual our generation may be, but where there are senses there will be sensual inducements. How antagonistic to godliness the habit

of impurity is, it needs no homily to show. It is the precise opposite of a spiritual mind, fitted by its very shape and power to contradict every impulse of piety. It deadens every holy sensibility. It drains the very pith and marrow of the moral frame, leaving it only a stark skeleton in ghastly disease. When it seizes on the thoughts it perverts every faculty. It looks at everything through the medium of lust. All taste, all sentiment, all affection, all intercourse becomes poisoned by this leaven of grossness. To the pure, says the apostle, all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled nothing is pure, but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate. I would not desire, even if I could, to deepen the solemnity of this declaration. Fearful enough it is to think of the soul's eye, so bleared with the humours of its lusts as to distort its vision, and turn everything it sees into corruption, and to remember that only the pure in heart can see God, or appreciate his holiness, or enjoy his love. Let the Christian guard against it in thought, no less than in act. Let him check the roving eye, and cast away the licentious book, and purify his spirit with the incense of prayer, in order to be as becomes a brother or sister of the spotless Saviour.



Again, "Whatsoever things are lovely, think on these things." Besides the honest, stalwart virtues of truth and justice—besides the healthful attributes of soberness and purity, we are now told the Christian must be endued with qualities of another sort, namely, ornamental qualities. We must have whatsoever is lovely in character and manner. This seems at first view to be a minute and unworthy injunction to be set forth with the solemnity of apostolic authority. Shall the Christian, whose soul is engrossed with the big realities of an eternal world, fritter away his regard upon traits of character which, to speak the best of them, are only lovely? Shall he study the proprieties of mere manner? Yes, my brethren, so says our inspired teacher. Think on whatsoever is lovely, in order to practise it. It was not without reason that the ancients denominated manners as the lesser morals. Good manners are the polish of society, even as good morals are its golden band. Morals are the security, manners are the beauty, of the social state. As those render it safe to live with our fellows, so these make it pleasant. Society cannot subsist at all without something of whatsoever is just and true, and neither can it subsist happily without something of whatsoever is lovely. The kind speech, the gentle demeanour,

the amiable sympathy, the tender forbearance of insult, the accommodation to others' weaknesses, kindness to inferiors, deference to superiors, frankness to equals, affability and goodness to all, the waiving of precedence, consideration shown even to prejudice and unreasonableness—these lovely things, the constituents of good breeding, are like a necklace of pearls for the adornment of society. Without them the dwelling-place of society would be a sty—with them it is a palace; nay more, it is a sweet and beautiful home. They are bounden Christian duties, because good breeding is but the garb of benevolence, and it shows how essential to human happiness benevolence is, that society even assumes the virtue if she has it not.

But the Christian does not falsely assume it. Benevolence is the human direction of his religion. And he is bound to act it out in all the loveliness of good manners, because he professes to have its principle dwelling with a living power in his heart. No man should be so well-bred as the Christian, not indeed in the training of artificial and fashionable modes, but by the instinctive promptings of the Holy Ghost, leading him not only to be benevolent, but to seem what he is. Whatsoever things are lovely then in deportment and life, think on them, fellow-christians, as your serious duties.

And now, finally, "Whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if any praise, think on these things." Here is a plain intimation that the Christian is to regard in his conduct the opinion of others. Not that he may sacrifice his principles, or ever be anything than what is consistent with grave and solemn duty. But he is to take heed that good be not evil spoken of. He is to adorn the doctrine of God the Saviour, not only by solid virtues and lovely traits and graces, but by consulting even the opinions of the wise and considerate in things which might not be in themselves wrong and sinful. The apostle thus suggests a subject which opens largely into the discussion of the influence of example on the reputation of religion as a Christian motive, a discussion too large for our present opportunity. I have only time to commend it to your consciences, and to remind you how the eyes of a gainsaying world are fixed upon the Church, and how its carping tongue is ready to utter cavil and contempt against the followers of Jesus, and to reproach every one who mingles in its loved scenes of questionable purity and its practices of doubtful morality; which, to say the least, give the Christian soul no edification, no added fitness for heaven, which inspire no purer hope, nor more spiritual joy, but rather deaden the already living impulses of God within him.

Avoid them then, dear brethren, if they be not of good report, turn from them and pass away, be contented with purer associations, be satisfied with the holy reflection that shall give peace to your death-bed and rapture to your eternity, that, so far as you were concerned, you kept the robe of Christ which you wore on earth pure from all filthiness, or stigma, or reproach.

If ye do these things ye shall never fall, and the peace of God, which passeth understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. Amen.

## SERMON X.

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### THE DIFFICULTIES OF SALVATION.

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1 Peter iv. 18.

“IF THE RIGHTEOUS SCARCELY BE SAVED, WHERE SHALL THE UN-GODLY AND THE SINNER APPEAR?”

THE apostle does not say, “If the righteous be saved,” as if there were any doubt on that question; but if they “*scarcely* be saved,” implying that, however sure their salvation may be, it is to be secured against many difficulties and severe opposition.

It is plain that there is no expressed doubt of the final triumph of the righteous. It seems to be a part of the Divine plan to single out the Christian for peculiar trials from which the common multitude are exempted. It seems to belong to the very nature of the Christian life, to meet with trials and anxieties which can happen to none but a Christian. Although from one point of view it is an easy and a delightful thing to be a Christian, from another it is a most anxious and

difficult undertaking. Viewed from that high level on which eternity shines, from whence we behold the blissful issue to which the Christian path leads on, and viewed by one who can understand the superior sources of joy which the Christian has in himself and in God, the Christian life seems a way of pleasantness and all its paths seem peace. But viewed by the light of this life, and in reference to the common principles of flesh and blood, the course of piety is a long endurance, which has but little to interest and nothing to captivate the common heart of the world.

For the Christian is made of flesh and blood as well as of soul and spirit, and his lower nature will very often make itself heard and felt in the agony of its trial, in spite of those celestial impulses and those inspiring views of Divine things which would otherwise make his life an anticipated heaven. It is these trials of our natural constitution which make up the difficulties of the Christian life. They are real trials, very severe and very formidable.

I shall, therefore, invite you to consider the subject implied by the expression, "If the righteous scarcely be saved." That subject may be entitled, "The difficulties in the way of a Christian's salvation."

It is quite plain that, however sure the way of

a godly man may be, and however matchless the eternal weight of his bliss beyond the grave, yet he is saved with great difficulty after all. He is just saved and no more. His path to glory lies along the very brink of ruin. His salvation will be a wonder to all eternity.

Salvation began in difficulty. In the counsels of God there was an apparent opposition to mercy. Conflicting attributes of Jehovah, to speak after the manner of men, conflicting attributes hard to be reconciled, and the plan of redemption was to human eyes a compromise. Justice and truth were at strife with compassion. How long the travail of our peace lasted we are not told. But it was not developed until after weary ages of man's unmitigated sin. And if there was difficulty in the conception so there was in the execution of our redemption. The supernatural had to clothe itself with the natural. God had to encompass himself with man. The Infinite had to stoop down and enter within the finite. That which seems absurd in reasoning, paradoxical in statement, and impossible in fact, had to be completely effected before salvation, as a scheme, could be finished. So difficult a thing to be conquered, even by omnipotent love, is human sin. And this wonderful arrangement makes the salvation of man the perpetual *mystery* of redemption.

And on the cross, where all the mighty plan was wrought out, our faith, like a telescope, brings into open view the difficulty which was felt in heaven to be in the way of human happiness. The crucifixion was the last agony of that difficulty. As it showed the plan to be practicable, so it showed how near it came to an impossibility. Nature herself could not yield her consent to the awful fact without a mighty travail. The heavens and the earth sympathized with the Divine difficulty with groans, and trembling, and dark mourning. We shall see no such revelation of Divine things again, until we see the difficulty unfolded in all its length and breadth in the consummation of the judgment day.

These were what we may call the Divine obstacles to our salvation, and when we survey and estimate them, it seems as if man, though redeemed, was scarcely redeemed by the cross. Just redeemed, no more. And this view, being finished, might lead us to turn our minds to see how this redemption of all mankind was to be turned into salvation for its individual members.

If the Divine difficulty was so great, what must the human difficulties be? We might expect that salvation would not be easy to us, which was so full of difficulty to God himself. With all the obduracy of that most impenetrable thing,



an unhumbled heart, and with all the stiffness of a depraved will bent away from all good and holy actions, the work of regeneration seems to be a process at least as difficult as creation, the making of something out of nothing; nay, more difficult, for in creation there was only something *to be made*, but in regeneration there is something to be first *unmade*. In the former there was, to say the most, only a negative resistance to no being; but in the latter, there is the active and strong repugnance of an angry will. The whole living nature of man was a difficulty.

And there will be difficulties springing out of the same corruption of nature as it is influenced by a tempting world without, and tempting spirits within. Although regenerated, the Christian is neither glorified nor translated. He is a denizen of a corrupted earth, the possessor of a sensitive nature, and, therefore, oftentimes the victim of a cunning foe.

The Scriptures commonly represent a life of piety as a wrestling, a warfare, a pilgrimage, a race. It is not an easy slide into salvation. It is not a quiet and dozing journey, by which we are drawn along through life in pleasant dreams and wake up in heaven. The inducements of life and society, howsoever good in their right use, become the tempting causes of sin to the best

men, engrossing the thoughts, then the sensibilities, and then the heart, until the whole consenting man is in danger of being sacrificed

The chief danger of the world to Christian men and women is, that they will not only use it but serve it. It is not that a blight and curse has passed over everything that God has made, so that it is all bad and only bad. Nature is sweet, and society is sweet, and life is a blessing in itself, and business and recreation are both necessary to the sustaining and recruiting of our lives. Wealth is not necessarily an evil. It is only the love of it which is the deep root of evil. Genius, strength, beauty, accomplishments, are not the spontaneous sources of sin. They are each and all so many Divine gifts and talents, and their use and enjoyment is not a crime, but a chartered privilege and a bounden duty. They ought to be to the Christian what they would be to an angel, high and virtuous incitements, waking up the soul to gratitude and adoration of the Giver, soliciting forth noble impulses of duty, glad returns of love and an entire devotion to his glory.

The great temptation of the Christian is to *inordinate* affection, loving all these things better than they deserve, exalting means into ends, making that an object which was meant to be

only an occasion. His regard for the world is liable to degenerate into a passion. His commerce with the world may easily become too much. His relish of life and its good things, his hurrying chase of business or pleasure, then take on the odious character of idolatry. He loves the creature more than the creator. The voice of conscience is smothered; the view of eternity becomes rare and unpleasant; the state of his soul is forgotten and not inquired into; until, if he goes on thus, his nature becomes steeped in worldliness, and his spirit grows drunken and insensible. That Christian has virtually another God, whether it be pleasure, or fashion, or reputation, or money, or sensual ease. His heart is a desecrated temple, whose altar is torn down, whose proportions are broken, and whose sacred adornments are dismantled and trodden. The common air of the world whistles and howls through it, instead of God's melodies; and foul birds and vermin dwell where the Holy Ghost dwelt.

And this all comes of the excessive tampering with innocent pursuits and pleasures. It comes from abusing the world in its use. It comes from easily deciding that because a thing was not a sin in itself, therefore no use of it could be sinful. It comes from an outward habit of too

much engagement with the world, and this habit came from the want of an inward motive of doing everything, and using everything, in subordination to the Divine will.

The only safeguard against all this, is to make the glory of God the supreme aim of his life. To use all things, and enjoy all things, as if God's eye were upon him, and he was to render him an immediate account. He is in no danger from the world while the world is outside of him, while he looks at it as a thing separated from himself, to be used but not to be identified with his feelings, or his life.

The danger from the world is, when it creeps into our hearts and fills and crowds the place of our affections, where God should be. Worldliness consists in the world that is within us, not in the world that is without.

I speak not now of practices and pursuits which are immoral and confessedly bad. I suppose the Christian exempted, by his regeneration, from the power of such things. But I speak only of such as are innocent in themselves, or so plausible that they can easily represent themselves as innocent. They have an allowed place in our hearts; we fondle them, nurse them, miss them when they are absent, until, bye and bye, they insidiously grow to master us, lulling us

with dreamy music, twining silken cords round our affections, one by one, until, when we awake, we find ourselves fixed in immovable apostasy from all holy delights. No common might can then free us; no usual solicitation of God's sweet spirit can dissolve the endearment of that charm. In a sort of giddy, delirious joy, we hug the dear world, and shut our ears to conscience and eternity.

Oh! it needs much light from God, a clear view of consequences, a simple and sincere faith, and a most pure and honest conscience. A soul ought to be very familiar with eternity to judge rightly of such things. A Christian ought to realize his death-bed every day, in order to be safe from mistake; and above all things he ought to be so accustomed to ask counsel of his Saviour, that his mind shall always be able to test a question of duty, with a Divine discretion. And when we remember how many, and how pleasant those delights are, and mark how many followers of Jesus have fallen away from him through such entanglements, it seems strange that any can be saved, and we cannot help thinking they can "*scarcely* be saved."

And another difficulty of salvation lies not in worldly indulgence, but in the tendencies of our moral disposition. Besides the outward tempta-

tions of life, our inward impulses become sources of sinning, far more hard to be repressed than mere worldly conformity. Pride, and suspicion, and envy, and uncharitableness, have no outward sign, no visible form by which we know when they invade our souls. We can see, and touch, and handle the objects of the world, and, if they come too near our hearts, we can repel them. If we feel that we are enslaved to any worldly thing, we know where to strike in order to break the chain that binds us to it. But the insidiousness of our moral propensities, makes them our most dangerous foes. While we are watching the enemy that is seen, we are ambushed by one that is hidden. One may be very exemplary in his abstinence from the world, who is blindly wicked in his social human feeling. He may be punctilious in his devotions, and his very prayers may be conceived in such a temper as to nourish his ill nature and his spiritual pride. Christ's gentle spirit is oftener wounded by malevolence burrowing in the heart, and far more keenly wounded, than by the thoughtless addiction of the Christian to too much of the world. It is harder to be a mild and forgiving Christian, than it is to be an anchorite—harder to be humble, than to wear sackcloth—to be penitent, than to do penance. It is easier to pray all day, than it

is not to be proud that we pray; easier to regulate our lives, than to keep our hearts. Love is the tenderest, and the vital cord of the Christian life, yet love is more sinned against by the Christian, than any other virtue.

Often, under a sanctimonious air, will be cloaked the spirit of discontent, and fault-finding, and uncharitable surmisings of heart, sometimes breaking out in unfriendly words, and wicked gossip, and false accusations, that show more clearly the foulness of their source, than the fault of their subject. They prove, at least, that there is one wicked Christian who has many difficulties of the worst sort to overcome, before he can be saved. I say many difficulties, for he who violates Christian love, has to sacrifice all the beautiful attendants which wait at her door: humility, and gentleness, and single-heartedness, and honesty towards God and men, and the outer guard of all, a pure tongue. And the foul feelings that enter in, are pride, boasting itself better than his neighbour; envy, glad to detract from his neighbour's excellence; sophistication of heart, practised in its own corruption; deceitfulness, wearing the appearance of a friendship it does not feel.

To attemper the soul to love, to have it always kind and considerate to others' weaknesses, to

restrain the tongue from scandal, and the feelings from suspicion, to hide the fault we see from envious and gloating eyes, to mourn over a friend's foibles as if they were our own, to mourn over them as Christ does, and pray for them as he prays, with patient intercession, night and day; this is a dear accomplishment which is beyond our easy reach. It is a difficulty in our way, so great that when we think of it, it seems as if the best of us could scarcely be saved.

I said that when we offend against love, we commit many sins in one. The vices are an unweaned brood. They go in flocks. Where one enters, they all nestle together, and the danger of the Christian is, that in the careless guarding of his heart, they will creep in while he thinks least of them, and turn his heart to a cage of unclean birds.

Whether it be pride satisfied or mortified—whether it be love of admiration, or of notice from others, or discontent at Providence, or any other sinful feeling, it rarely enters alone into the heart. It never can *stay* alone—no true Christian virtue can live with it long. It destroys all that is good within. It surreptitiously betrays the soul into the hands of the great enemy, and gives it up to be lost.

It is a very mournful view of human nature,



and seems to make but little of the power of regeneration. But it is a true view of much of the life that is commonly called Christian. It does not, however, derogate any thing from Divine grace, though it brand with flagrant condemnation this too frequent alliance of human pride and human depravity—real imbecility with fancied strength. “Thou thinkest that thou art rich and increased in goods, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”

And these are difficulties which the righteous Christian feels the most fearfully, for the very reason that he is not their victim. Those persons who yield to them, are generally unconscious of their power, and yield sweetly and contentedly. But the conscientious and self-suspecting Christian watches his own heart, and he sees these enemies, which his own spirit has begotten, prowling for a stolen entrance, and he fears, and weeps, and prays sometimes with agony. And if his anxious conscience ever detects one of these foul, secret things crouching down in the corners of his heart, he will struggle with it, and fight against it with every weapon he can lay his hand upon, and his conscience will not be still, nor allow him to be so, until he has torn it from his heart, and barred the door against its return.

In the thought of such things do we not musingly say, "If the righteous scarcely be saved"—saved with scarcity, with nothing to spare?

And now let me detain you a little longer, to mention another great difficulty in the way of the salvation even of the righteous—I mean the difficulty of resisting Satan's power.

This is a difficulty that in one sense is outward, and in another sense inward. His power comes from abroad, but it operates within spiritually. It is a startling thought, even at first sight, that there is such a being as he, mighty in his intelligence and in his permitted power, and so very malignant in his designs. An archangel ruined is no despicable foe, if he turn his deliberate strength against us. Salvation is no tilting of a gala day, if it is to be won by conquering him. An unseen enemy never sleeping, watching our weak points, knowing our besetting sins, and skilled to use everything without and within us to hurt our souls, and with a malice whetted to the keenest purpose of destruction, is too much of a foe to be despised or parleyed with. He seizes the world, and dresses it in ten thousand bright and meretricious beauties to captivate us. He lays hold of our propensities and lusts, and makes them pierce our own souls. He foment our envy, and ill-will, and uncharitableness. He even

perverts our religious feelings, and makes our faith, and hope, and devotion, the occasions of our sin, so that our holy things have need of God's mercy. He aggravates every natural temptation, and makes temptations of those which are not naturally such. He dresses up our character with inconsistencies, and makes caricature Christians who think themselves true.

And then he makes glee and mockery of our faults, and glories against God whenever he can persuade a Christian to be satisfied with himself, and to think himself very pious. It is *he* who is the destroyer, and many a follower of Jesus has been his victim. It is against him that the Christian warfare is to be waged with patience, fortitude, and constant watching.

But one thing is plain, the opposition of this great foe seems to reduce the chances of salvation to so few, that we can see what the Scriptures mean when they say, "If the righteous scarcely be saved."

My brethren, in reviewing these difficulties of the Christian life, how much there is to discourage a timid person from pursuing it! Let me say then again, that, formidable as they are, they are not invincible. They have been conquered by a multitude which no man can number, who, with crowns, and palms, and white robes, are rejoicing

in the glory of the Lamb whom they so faithfully followed. Through Christ strengthening them, they came off conquerors and more than conquerors. Weak in themselves, they were mighty through God. They used the world as not abusing it. They subdued the flesh with all its profane and malignant desires; and they fought with the great enemy Apollyon, and by faith in Jesus they even made him flee. And though, with many a misgiving and many a wound, they were *saved*—scarcely saved indeed, with no superfluous strength, not a single endeavour too much, but saved nevertheless—saved from the death of the soul, saved without a wound unhealed, in the bosom of God forever and ever.

And from that place of safety they look down upon their pilgrimage. They can trace it as it ran along the brink of the dreadful downfall, up every steep rock, and down into every deep glen and mire. They remember the fierce fights with Satan, and recognise each place of conflict by the blood stains from their wounded souls. They can count their stopping places for prayer, for the grass grows green on the spots which were watered by their tears. And they can tell every point where their feet had well nigh slipped, and the dark recesses where they stumbled and fell. As they survey all this, and now, for the first

time, learn how near they came to death, they feel that they were saved with difficulty. But they are saved after all, and they turn with a shuddering delight to embrace their living Saviour, from whom they shall be separated no more.

Such honour have all his saints, and so shall we have if we are faithful, and loving, and sincere.

## SERMON XI.

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### DOUBTING FAITH.

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Matthew xiv. 31.

“O THOU OF LITTLE FAITH, WHEREFORE DIDST THOU DOUBT?”

I USE these words for our text, because they are the closing part of a story, full of beautiful instruction, on which I design to offer a practical commentary.

The Lord Jesus had sent his disciples in a ship, to cross the sea of Tiberias, while he remained to dismiss the multitude. Then, retiring to a mountain, he lingered until the evening in solitary prayer. How sweet must that devotion have been, which the beloved Son poured into the Father's ear! How exalted the communion of spirit, when the Saviour withdrew from the world, his soul unspotted by its pollution, and unsophisticated by its deceits, and drawing near to the fountain of tenderness, laid his head upon his Father's bosom! What intimacy of Divine affection did that lonely mountain witness! The

air of that solitude was filled with the gushings of such prayer as no heart but that of Jesus ever offered. The Bethel where Jacob wrestled with God in the strife of prayer, was not so memorable to holy hearts as that mountain spot.

And then, what a burden of interests was borne on the wings of his strong desires! When he went to pray to God, he carried on his heart the destinies of the world he came to redeem. He began, on earth, the intercession which he now liveth to make, day and night, in heaven. He prayed for his disciples, for us; that, when Satan desired to sift us as wheat, our faith might not fail. And, besides this, he prayed for himself, that his humanity might not shrink from the bloody trial of atonement. When we see the Lord of our souls so fervently anxious for their salvation, let us not be careless of their welfare: and when we remember that even the immaculate Jesus loved the place of solitary meditation and prayer, let us, whose need is so much greater than his, be often alone with God; echoing, with our souls, the spirit of Christ.

And let us bear in comfortable thought, that when his disciples are far away on the billows, tossed on the troubles of the times, the watchful Redeemer is praying for them still, and consulting with God for their safety.

For the narrative tells us that the ship in which the disciples were, "was now in the midst of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary." The evening had come, and their beloved Master came not. Night had fallen all around them, and they were buffeting the winds and waves in absolute cheerlessness. The sea was not large, but large enough to drown their little bark, as if it were an ocean. Desponding thoughts may have come across their minds, for they grievously missed their Master. They knew that he could still the winds and the waves, and if he were only asleep in their little cabin, they could awake him, and say, "Lord, carest thou not that we perish?" and then they would be content.

And why should he send them out on such a comfortless and dangerous expedition, and he stay behind? If he could only be the sharer of their trials, to speak a word of sympathy and cheer them by his presence, their condition would be more tolerable—but to be left alone upon the waters, in this dead night of the tempest, was a disheartening thing. We may see in this the picture of much of our Christian experience. It may be all daylight, and a quiet sea, when we unmoor our souls for the voyage of religion. It was the word of Jesus which constrained us to



go; and while the heavens were fair, we sailed on hopefully, and were cheered by the remembrance of the Saviour, as we parted from him on the shore. But, bye and bye, there comes a twilight to our hope, and we miss the Lord. We see divine things dimly; the shadows of night settle more thickly about us. Persecution or reproach buffets us like a contrary wind, and we find ourselves in the midst of afflictions, like an angry sea, till we cry out, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." We know not that Jesus is praying for us; we seem to be all alone in life; and we wonder how religion can be called a way of pleasantness, and her path a path of peace. We remember the pleasant days of our early religious experience, and we long for the blessedness we knew, and the soul-refreshing views of Jesus. And so we sail in these dark waters, as the disciples did through the first, and the second, and the third watches of the night; till our troubles grow even darker than the midnight, and a sullen gloom hems us around in despair.

Now God is not ignorant of these prospective trials. He designs them indeed for our higher sanctification. In very few instances, if in any, does the heart of a Christian learn the whole lesson of faith at once. The first impressions of

our religious state are so very joyous, and shed over the heart such a sweet peace, that while we heartily ascribe all the glory to Divine grace, we are prone still to think more of the peace than of the grace. We are engrossed by a consciousness, such as we never had before, that we are changed and regenerated creatures. When we come to Christ, we have a repose of mind, so different from the anxiety and fear that have agitated us before, that it is like rest to a weary labourer—and we fall quickly asleep, thinking that we are leaning securely on the bosom of Jesus. In this state of spiritual torpor, we are liable to forget that ours is a holy calling, and we fall insensibly into a state of carnal and worldly-minded security.

To bring us out of this state of insensibility, God arouses us by some providential dispensation, which troubles and afflicts our souls. Sickness, or bereavement, or the loss of property, or the falseness of trusted friends, drives us to seek consolation from something higher than the world. But when we look around for Christ, we remember that we parted with him on the shore. We trusted so much more to the pleasant change, than to the Saviour who produced it; to our inward feelings, than to an absent Christ; that we have grown estranged from him, and now we are

ready to despair. Our sorrow overwhelms us like a sea-wave. We reel to and fro, and stagger beneath the storm of trouble; and so we pass through the several stages of trial, each growing darker than the last, like the night watches, till we are past the very midnight of our dark grief, and lie helplessly down, convinced that we can do nothing, and fearing that we shall sink and lose our salvation at last.

“But this is our infirmity,” as the Psalmist says, and we should “remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.” Man’s extremity is God’s opportunity; and “whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth.” The trials which he sends are designed to teach us the lesson of faith, which we learned so imperfectly at first. We always estimate the preciousness of the Saviour, by our own need of him; and we never can know the delight there is in his love, till we have been brought to feel the entire worthlessness of the world, and are driven to make him our all in all.

This is the sweetness of adversity—and the sequel of the story shows that Christ is nearest, when he is most needed. As it is always darkest before day, so Jesus waited until the fourth watch of the night, and then he appeared walking on the sea.

Whether it was by attenuating his own body

to the consistency of a spirit, and suspending the power of gravitation, or by condensing the liquid pavement into a solid foothold, that this miracle was done, we are not informed. But we know whose prerogative it is alone to "tread upon the waves of the sea;" and "whose path is in the mighty waters;" and this act is an attestation that Jesus is the sovereign of the elements, and that "all things were made for him, and by him all things consist." "Thy way, oh God, is in the sea."

We see, moreover, that not only does the Saviour wait till we are convinced we have no other helper, but when he approaches, he may come in an unexpected way. When, in their extremity, the disciples longed for him more eagerly than they who watch for the morning, they doubtless thought that they should not see him again till they had reached the shore. But Christ comes in his own way, and that, sometimes, so strange a way, that his very presence disturbs and terrifies us. We do not recognize him, in the ghostly form that we see moving on the surface of our troubles, and our minds being possessed with the persuasion that we are deserted, this new appearance seems only like an added trouble to our peace. For, "when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they said, It is a spirit, and cried

out for fear." How many a trembling soul has been affrighted at the presence of the Saviour; treating him as a messenger of evil tidings, and wishing him away! How many a person, in the deep night of his convictions, knew not that the presence which tortured his soul was Christ's own spirit of salvation!

But mark his method of assurance. Straightway, Jesus spake unto them, saying, "Be of good cheer, it is I, be not afraid." Winning words—words of friendship; spoken, too, in the confidence of reciprocal friendship. He does not announce himself as to a stranger. He does not say, as he said to his persecutor Saul, "I am Jesus!" He speaks to the ear and heart of love, which had treasured in remembrance every tone of his accustomed voice. Just so did he reveal himself to Mary, weeping in her distraction at her Master's tomb; and when Jesus said unto her, "Mary," she knew by the thrill of sympathy which a loved voice awakens, that her lost Master was before her, and she cried out, "Rabboni"—my Lord. The Saviour had described it as a characteristic of his sheep, that they hear his voice and they know him. And when he said, "It is I," he trusted to the quick sense of friendship to recognize the speaker, and bid him all hail.

“It is I”—what hidden force the words convey! It was not necessary to say to them *what* he was. No titles of grandeur or Divinity could have meant so much to them. He *was* the King of kings and Lord of lords. He *was* the incarnate Deity, to whom all power belonged in heaven and earth. He was the glorious antitype of all inspired types. He was the great High Priest of an atonement for all mankind. But all these titles of magnificence, uttered by an archangel’s trumpet, would not have signified so much to the hearts of these disciples as the simple words he used—“It is I.” All those titles might be his, and bring him no nearer to them. He might be glorious in his holiness, fearful in his praises, doing mighty wonders in heaven above and earth beneath; but their hearts would have said, “Tell us not what he is, but what he is to us.” “It is I.” That simple assurance covered everything. *Their* master it was who spoke; their companion, their friend. All-sufficient he was, they knew; but they rested most upon the fact that he was theirs. If it be thou, we are safe.

So true is the attraction of the Christian’s love for Christ. Only let it be truly begotten in his heart; let him once learn the feeling of nearness to the Saviour—the union of sympathy and the identity of life; let him be once in the habit of

intimate communion with the mercy-seat, where his soul feasts with Christ at his table of fat things; then let the storm come, and amidst its wildest beatings, when the Saviour speaks, he will recognize the still small voice, above the loudest wail of the winds, and will respond. Like the symbolic personage in the Canticles, his heart cries, "It is the voice of my beloved."

Oh, it is beautiful, the law of this spiritual magnetism! I wish for no purer test of truthful piety than this quick vibration of feeling to the sound of the Saviour's voice. It is a celestial sense; a new-born faculty, making us one with Christ—hiding our lives in him. In trial, temptation, sorrow—it will always be enough to sound, amidst the din, one tone of Jesus' voice, and the faithful heart will know it and pause for more.

"And Peter said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me to come to thee upon the water, and he said, Come."

Of all the disciples, Peter was the first to speak. We all remember the character of this eminent apostle. Prompt, eager, affectionate, full of zeal; we can distinguish him among the whole band. Strongly impulsive, he was just as rash in the expression of his love, and the avowal of his faith, as he was quick in the cowardly retreat.

Whichsoever feeling of his nature chanced to be uppermost at the time, it drew his whole nature after it, in one explosive act. If it was forward in faith, when the object of his faith was before his eyes, it was hasty in denial, when he was looking away from Christ. Yet he was a sincere man: *i. e.* his feelings were true, though changeable. He differed from a more common believer, not only in being less steadfast; but, I think, in being more honest. Where an ordinary disciple would have easily suppressed his feelings, because they were weak, Simon Peter would act them out, because they were strong. Where another would have avoided the blame of inconsistency, because no one knew his change of feeling, Peter would be reproached, because his nature was so transparent, that it could be read by all. Whatever he thought and felt, he thought and felt aloud. His faith, therefore, was not weak, but intermittent. His heart was not divided; but, for a moment, turned aside. He had but one supreme object of love; but he sometimes forgot that one—yet without loving another. When the object of his faith was before his eyes, no faith could possibly be more earnest. But if his mind turned away for an instant, it was an opportunity his enemy did not fail to use, to distract him into an inconsistency.



The whole recorded life of this apostle exemplifies this description; and the epitome of that same life is seen, with all its distinct features, in the transaction we are contemplating. "Peter said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee upon the water, and he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and, beginning to sink, he cried, Lord, save me."

Who would not know, without the name, that this could be none other than the fervent, but changeable Simon? With a faith that seems to have been looking out, even on the black waves, for his Master; and with a love that was sharpened by separation, to the keenness of a longing—his emotions outstripped those of the rest. While they were silent, from yet lingering terror, or from prudence, or from a weaker love—every other feeling in his heart was quelled by this burst of desire, "Bid me come unto thee upon the water." I will not come against thy will, lest I offend thee; I would not wait until thou comest to me, for that would show my love too tame and quiet; but I am willing to encounter a danger for my love. I only ask for thy permission.

True faith aspires to great things. It goes

out of the ordinary walk of life, and dares even to tread the waters. It is not content to be bound by the routine of common rules and fixed modes. It reaches beyond and above natural laws, and draws, from the sovereignty of omnipotence, its power of working. It will wait for the mustard seed to grow to a tree, if it must; but it aspires to remove mountains. It will sail in a human ship if it be sent; but it overleaps the bulwarks, to walk on the water, if it can. It will wait for Christ to come even to the very door of the heart, if he says, "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord;" but its impulse is to rush forth to meet the coming Saviour, and seek him while he is afar off.

True faith is an enterprising feeling. It sees invisible things. It compasses eternity. All that it wants, and waits for, is a Divine command, or the Saviour's promise; and it goes forth, strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, not knowing whither it goes: to fight the elements, or to battle with Satan; to tread the waves, or to convert the world. It trusts to the ravens for food; it fares sumptuously on a handful of meal and a cruse of oil. It overcomes death, and reaches the glory of the kingdom of God.

Such was the character of Peter's faith; but

it wavered when he turned his eyes away from Christ, and saw the waves lashed by the boisterous wind; and he was afraid, and began to sink. Mournful commentary upon human infirmity!

How many of us have acted this weakness over again,—Love, distrust; faith, fear; hope, discouragement, possessing our bosoms, each in its turn pursuing and defeating the last! Now, we call on Christ, out of a full heart; then, we question if he returns our love. Now, we venture nobly to do his work; then, we see the lion in the path and halt. Now, we anticipate success, and nothing seems too large; presently, we give up all to ominous conjecture, and the grasshopper is a burden. We pray; and then we are prayerless. We labour in the field of usefulness in Christ's cause; and then, we throw down our Bibles, and tracts, and Sunday school books, before the working day is half done. We bestow our goods liberally to the cause of Christian beneficence; and then, when the galvanic spasm has passed away, our hands clutch the dear gold as rigidly as ever. We sometimes join, heart with heart, at the mercy seat, where they are melted together, in the fervid outpouring of desire, that God would bless his gospel, here and every where; and then, the hectic flush of devotion subsides, and we sink into a collapse,

which leads on to a more deadly chill. Oh! the faltering Peter was not alone in his faltering. Would to God we emulated his goodness as closely as we imitate his faults!

But, brethren, whether his or ours, those faults arise from the same cause. We walk by sight rather than by faith. We look away from Christ, to the whelming winds and waves. Then we lose our dependence, our faith lets go, and down we sink, with only space to cry out, before the gurgling waters have strangled us in perdition, "Lord, save me!" It is the ejaculation of a heart that is true at the core, "Lord, save me!" The soul that is at all familiar with the Saviour will be sure to remember him in its extremity. The test of affection is that it is always strongest at parting. That is the one best loved of all, whose name lingers on the dying breath. And so the Christian will not fail to cry out as he sinks, "Lord—my Jesus—save me!" It is a wholesome sign to be surprised into a prayer.

This is enough, for it is at least the root of faith. And immediately he stretches out his hand, and catches him, and says, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" There was a reproof accompanying the salvation, but how tolerable is the reproof of mercy in its very act! This is the fulfilment of that prayer of holy

writ, "O Lord, correct me, but with judgment, not in thy anger, lest thou bring me to nothing." The soul can survive many corrections of grace, and grow stronger in love and faith. It will kiss the rod of compassion, and nestle in the Saviour's bosom the more affectionately as his tenderness reproves more often. It is the rebuke of his *justice* that kills, and drowns us in perdition. But he did not say to Simon, "Nay, thou hast doubted me, and now thou shalt die." The mercy of the act muffled the severity of the chiding, and Jesus and Peter were dearer to each other than ever.

And so shall it be with all such. Oh! if you have strength enough to ejaculate in your languishing, "Lord, save me!" you shall be saved.

You may be in the deep waters of affliction, fearful and ready to sink; but do not despair. A Saviour treads above those waters—cry out to him, and he will answer with the saving strength of his right hand. When your faith is weak, your prayer should be more earnest. Your doubts have displeased him, but your distress will conciliate him again. You have wounded him by your distrust, but his heart will be healed when he holds you in his embrace. Whatever our sorrows, spiritual or worldly, and whatever the cause of our doubts, afflictions, or sins, we

must cease to look at the waves, we must think only of Christ. Look up to him. "Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord,"—"Lord, hear my voice," and save me. He will console your Christian spirits, and uphold you with his everlasting arm. "When thou goest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the floods, they shall not overflow thee." In the bosom of Jesus your disquieted heart shall have perfect peace.

And let me commend the precious truth to those, if they be here, who, in the uneasiness of a convicted conscience, are longing for a Saviour whom they know not. Even to you is the offer of this salvation sent. Although your sins may rise about you like an angry sea, and your fears discourage you from praying, yet we exhort you to turn a single look of faith to Him who hath his way in the whirlwind and the storm of human wickedness. Sob out one prayer, at least, to the Saviour who looks down upon your sinking soul—"Lord, save me!" You shall not pray in vain. He will stretch out his hand to save you. He will draw you to his side, and uphold you with his free Spirit. Your sins shall not be so much as mentioned by him. He will indeed rebuke you, but not in anger; not for the countless transgressions that are past. All the iniqui-

ties of your unregenerate life, and the constant iniquity of an unregenerate heart, he will pass utterly by. And his only reproach, as he weeps tears of love and joy over your rescued spirit, will be that you could distrust his tenderness, and sin against his compassion. You will love him the more, as he bends down to your embrace, and says, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

## SERMON XII.

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### THE CHRISTIAN AT HOME.

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Genesis xviii. 19.

“I KNOW HIM, THAT HE WILL COMMAND HIS CHILDREN AND HIS HOUSEHOLD AFTER HIM, AND THEY SHALL KEEP THE WAY OF THE LORD.”

OUR subject, this morning, is holiness in the family, or the Christian at home.

The scripture which I have selected as a text, is one of many in which our heavenly Father has declared his peculiar commendation of domestic piety. The patriarch Abraham, of whom these words were spoken, was honoured by special tokens of the Divine favour, in consequence of his fidelity to his household duties. God made him the confidant of his purposes, and admitted him to such friendly partiality, as to receive his intercessions for Sodom, and to promise, that if the conditions proposed by Abraham could be met, the doomed city should yet be spared from the vengeance of eternal flames. When



we recollect that this patriarch is distinguished by the eminent title of "the friend of God;" and observe, as in our text, that the proof of his fidelity rests on his conscientious discharge of his parental duties, the importance and value of this department of religion assume at once a high rank.

Although I have named, as my subject, "the Christian at home," yet, as the limits of a discourse oblige me to select that view of the subject which is most comprehensive, and most important, I pass by the mutual responsibilities of brothers and sisters, and the duties of children to their parents, to consider that class of obligations which belong to the relation of a parent alone. The duties of brothers and sisters are the duties of equals towards each other; essentially the same as those relative obligations which bind together the whole community. And the duties of children are comprised in the general propriety of submission to authority, an obligation which embraces many other relations besides the domestic. But the duties of parents are peculiar—confined within the circle of the household, and touching no point that is not found in that one line of relationship.

The parent stands to his household in the imitative capacity of creator. He is the fount and

origin of an authority the most absolute of any on earth. All other human government was preceded historically, and in the nature of things, by the domestic rule. It is the only government which has never been claimed to have been established by social compact. It stands on a singular eminence, in lone peculiarity; confessedly divine. The duties, therefore, which grow out of the parental relation, and cluster around it, always are found only in the family. Aside from his other duties, as a member of society, and a member of church, and more momentous in its consequences than any other, the parent is bound by obligations which are all his own. And when we would see holiness in the family, or the Christian at home; if we would see it in its most complete and comprehensive form, we must find it in the exercise of parental influence.

We may consider the parental duty as comprising these three, viz: 1st, the dedication of his children to God; 2d, their education, and 3d, the exercise of control and discipline.

1st. The dedication of young children to God, in some way, is a duty recognized, I believe, by all Christians, of whatever name. I am not sure that it is not a suggestion of nature, since we find something like it, even among the heathen. And the organization of families is so primitive

and necessary an institution, as to warrant the conviction, that it is a special object of the Divine purpose, and, consequently, of the Divine care. However this may be, *revealed* religion has always inculcated the duty. Under the elder dispensation, the rite of circumcision was the appointed method by which the young child was dedicated to God, which was superseded, under the Gospel, by the ordinance of baptism. In this community, and specially in this congregation, there is no deficiency in the observance of this rite. But it would betray a lamentable defect of spiritual apprehension, to suppose that the parental duty was satisfied by the mere outward rite. The form of baptism is not the simple transaction that it seems to be. It is the sign of a deep purpose of the heart, in which the whole willing faculties of the Christian parent are concerned. In the presentation of the child in the temple, there is involved a cordial, believing surrender of him to both the mercy and the authority of the sovereign Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The parent thereby alienates his own title to his child; and when he receives him again from the font, he receives him as a sacred loan from his heavenly Father, to be educated for him, and to be recalled whenever he shall choose.

I cannot conceive of any interpretation of in-

fant baptism, short of this, which does not nullify its whole import, and turn religious ordinances to most trivial ceremonies. As there are in baptism, most evidently, the form and the words of dedication, the simple and only question for the Christian parent is, whether that form and vow are to be like the oath of the custom-house, or a covenant for the judgment-day, and for eternity. As the rite of baptism does not *create* the duty of dedication, but only declares it, it is plain that the duty is not satisfied by a compliance with the form alone. The duty is the same under all circumstances; and would be the same, if there were no church, no minister, no baptism. Among the shades of the loneliest forest, in the centre of the most solitary desert, drifting on the naked ocean, where there is no one but parent, child, and God; there lives the duty—destroyed by no shipwreck, altered by no circumstances—the duty of dedicating the infant to the mercy and the obedience of his God and Saviour. It is then purely a spiritual act; demanding the sincerity of the heart, as much as the parent's own self-dedication to God. If the spirit and import of this act were thus truly estimated by Christian parents, the baptism of infants would not be the mere outward ceremony which it too often is. It would be approached with the sol-

emn stir of feeling, and the preparation of prayer. It would be entered upon with engagedness of heart, and the awful sense of covenanting with God. And when completed, it would leave behind it that calm of holy assurance which always follows a true sacrifice. And henceforward, that infant would be, to the parent's eye, not a mere creature for the enjoyment of this world; not his own exclusive property, but consecrated and pledged for God, and to be trained for him whose he is.

This first exercise of parental authority, therefore, prepares the way for the second, viz: the religious education of his children. As the act of dedication was an acknowledgment of the parent's dependence on God, this second duty implies his responsibility. In the yet sleeping faculties of his babe, the Christian parent beholds a capacity, which is to be developed, not only to the limits of time and sense, but to everlasting duration. He recognizes powers which shall grow to be mighty for weal or woe. He knows there is in that infant spirit a germ whose fruits shall be undecaying in heaven or in hell. And this alternative will be determined, very much, if not absolutely, by the parental agency and influence.

There is a theory abroad that the child's mind should be undisturbed by any religious teaching, until he is old enough to form his own opinions,

in order that he may approach the subject with impartiality and candour. If there were no native tendency to sin welling up in the soul—if there were no self-love leading it to repel unpleasant truths—if there were no such thing as habit hating all change—if there were no world without, stimulating all the powers and propensities—if the mind and heart could be kept a perfect blank vacancy, ready to receive the holy teaching when it should come, and if religious truths were mere opinions instead of Divine facts—there might be in this theory a plausible show of sense. But when we remember the activities of human nature, putting themselves forth into spontaneous exercise, and grasping all objects of sense and thought; when we remember the passive powers of childhood, taking impressions like the softened wax from every contact; when we remember its faculty of absorption, imbibing from the social atmosphere health or sickness; when we remember, in a word, that the world, the flesh and the devil are combined to educate the soul; so that all its powers shall grow stiff in bad habit, and all its capacities be filled with falsehood, and closed up against religion by the prejudice of an unconverted heart, and that most obdurate of all bigotry, the bigotry of sin; when we remember all this, the theory of religious neutrality in edu-

cation seems to have no element of reason to redeem its absurdity. No Christian, with the open Bible before him, can for a moment countenance the falsehood. It has the sulphurous taint about it that betrays its origin offensively.

Contrary to all this, the Scriptures enjoin the duty of religious education as of paramount importance. To "train up a child in the way he should go," and to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," are injunctions which a Christian cannot lightly avoid. Whom shall ye teach knowledge, and make to understand doctrine? Them who are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breast. And the duty begins with the very commencement of the parental relation. In the cradle—sooner than that—in the first maternal embrace, for aught that can be shown to the contrary, there may be with the pressure of those loving arms an influence that shall impress the soul just shaped for eternity. In the mingling glances which shoot from those eyes looking up and looking down into each other, why may not the mother's gaze, glistening with the vivid fire of parental love, waken magnetic impulses in the breast of the child, as well as the lambent light of his own laughing look rouse up in the mother's bosom a stronger yearning of tenderness? In the secrecy of that nurs-

ing chamber there may thus be going on an intercourse of unutterable power, to stir the leading impulses of the whole future life. If such a thing be even possible—and it is more than that—it would teach every Christian mother the sacred value of her early influence, and should be as a warning not to delegate to a cold-hearted substitute the paramount office which God and nature have devolved implicitly upon herself. Throughout the whole period of infancy, the Christian mother has the same responsibility and greater facilities for training the moral nature of her child. Before the thinking powers are developed, the sensibilities have their activity, and make up the infant's life. These may be excited and swayed in many ways. The sweet dreams of his mother's lap may be associated in his mind forever with the music of the saints, with which he was sung to sleep. The calmness of maternal piety, bearing with his fretful temper, may keep in the back ground a crowd of passions that might have been angered by a nurse's petulance.

But passing out of infancy, behold him, when mind and feeling grow together. And here commences the joint sway of both parents, the season for imparting knowledge. Among the very earliest of all should be imparted the knowledge of God. It is quite surprising how naturally the



young mind reaches out after God, and lays hold on the idea of his providence and care. Indeed, it is the most congenial thought that can be presented it, for it harmonizes best with all the experience he has had of life. He already knows what a parent is; sees it, feels it, rejoices in it hourly, and it is easy to amplify that thought into the conception of the great and good Being who is over all. When religion is thus presented, with its loveliest objects foremost, and most adorable, the progress is easy from truth to truth, until the whole structure of the mind is shaped into conformity with an evangelical faith. And when, with this is blended the early and constant habit of prayer, there is an education which works the holy thoughts into the heart, and makes religion practical and powerful.

Religious education, however, does not terminate with childhood, nor with mere dogmatic teaching. It is not the catechism, nor the Sunday-school lesson, nor the forced respect to the Sabbath, which is to discharge the parent of his responsibility. Holiness in the family should be an atmosphere to be breathed in. Religion should not be a contraband topic, to be spoken in a whisper, as if it were offensive to ears polite, but as one of the familiar themes which make up life's business. Then the child will grow into

the natural and easy boldness, of not being ashamed of having a soul to take care of, and a God to honour. He will be inspired with an unconscious moral courage, such as becomes a man in Christ Jesus, and his tastes will be moulded after such a pattern, that vicious associations, and all forms of worldliness will fail to attract him. Here is the best antidote to the evils over which parents so often lament in the excesses of their children, in the period of young manhood and young womanhood; excesses which are just as much the natural effects of home influence, either negative or positive, as attraction and repulsion are of the opposite electricities. If the parent has been himself easily negligent of religion at home; if he has let the fire on the family altar go out; if he betrays a loving interest in the worldliness of the world, a spirit of weak compromise to usages which he pronounces wrong; if he has himself pandered to the worldliness of his child—fostered her vanity—incited his pride; if he has, on system, allowed him to be educated under influences directly adverse to his religion; and then, if, by his own intemperance, or rashness of temper, or malicious criticism of others, he has falsified to his children's eyes the holy profession which he has assumed, the education of that family so far fails to be religious, and he is not the Christian he ought to be at home.

Not to dwell longer upon this branch of the subject, let us pass to the third duty of the Christian parent—restraint and control. It was the special commendation of Abraham, that he would *command* his children after him. It was the curse of Eli, blasting his whole family, that he *restrained* not his sons. I speak now of a Christian duty, more commonly neglected than any other of our day. Parental restraint has grown to be almost an obsolete phrase. Either from the nature of our political institutions, or the common admiration of that independence, which is our national characteristic, the spurning of authority is an American fault, which has invaded the family, and spoiled it of its holiness. The reverence for parents enjoined in the Scriptures, is a quality too rarely seen even in Christian households. And an observant eye can hardly fail to discover the sad cause in that household itself. Parents, perhaps, from self-love imperfectly subdued, delight to see themselves over again in their children. They love to witness the independence of spirit of the little precocious man. They pet the pride of the boy, and foster the fancies of the girl. Pertness is sometimes miscalled manliness, and wilfulness is mistaken for wholesome energy, until self-esteem swells into monstrous prominence, and becomes so inflamed and sensitive, that it can be

approached only with extreme delicacy. The child's will becomes the law of the parents; to which the order, the custom, and sometimes the principles of the household are called to bend; and the poet's words are verified, though in a very different sense from that which he intended: "The child is father of the man." David displeased not his son Adonijah at any time, saying, Why hast thou done so?

It would be easy to show the mischievous consequences of such training, when systematized and made universal, upon the next and following generations, stimulating the spirit of self-will and insubordination, until passion will devour all piety, and the obdurate heart will find nothing congenial but atheism. But we, as Christians, have to deal with this subject, not as a matter of consequences, but of conscience. It is one of the most fearfully momentous duties of the Christian parent to control his children. The duty has indeed its limits. It is limited, in the first place, by the age of the child; and the parent has no right to extend an absolute dominion over those mature years, in which his son or daughter is competent to think and act for himself. It is most consistent with the evident design of the Creator, that the youth should be thrown sometimes on his own resources of talent and energy,

and learn wisdom even from his folly. Our woful experience is often the most wholesome. The parent's authority is limited again by the conscience of his child; and he has no right to interfere by any force but that of reason and prayer, with his religious convictions. For there is a better father than the human, and another master, to whom the child must stand or fall.

But although the parental responsibility is thus limited by age, the parent has no right to alienate it by shortening the natural period of pupilage, and exalting the child's whims into laws for himself. If his authority be limited by his child's conscience, he has no right to leave that conscience, to act blindly and from wayward impulse; so that with a large allowance for these exceptions, the duty still holds over him its large and emphatic claim to "command his children after him."

That control, no doubt, is most wholesome, as well as most dignified, which is exerted rather by moral influence than by rules and by power, addressing the conscience rather than the fears. Such control abides, fresh and vigorous, long after the child is a man. It even grows with the parent's decline, and encircles the grey head with a chaplet of authority ever green. There are instances, no doubt, in which the parent's

will must be asserted in the most peremptory and forcible way, and must be revered merely because it is his will, and the more powerful will of the two. Better then to employ the simple superiority of power than by neglecting one soul to imperil two. By whatever method, it is the imperative duty of the Christian parent to establish his authority *as the parent*. Failing of this, he fails of everything desirable and happy. Succeeding in this, he lays the foundation of a blessing which shall not only canopy his own head, but give shelter and repose to the generations of his children. For listen to God's benediction—“His children shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.” Yes, the blessing shall be upon that parent, the blessing of a posterity of holy families, whom he will not be ashamed to meet in eternity, and to say, “Lord, behold I, and the children thou hast given me,” who will rejoice to meet him, and will rise up together to call him blessed.

## SERMON XIII.

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### THE CHRISTIAN IN CHURCH.

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1 Chronicles xvi. 29.

“GIVE UNTO THE LORD THE GLORY DUE UNTO HIS NAME; BRING AN OFFERING AND COME BEFORE HIM: WORSHIP THE LORD IN THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS.”

WHEN the ark of the Lord was brought into the royal city from its long seclusion at Kirjath Jearim the occasion was one of jubilee. The tribes of Israel were summoned from their farthest bounds to celebrate the event with pomp and rejoicing music. On this occasion the king delivered to Asaph, the chief of the chosen Levites, a psalm of thanksgiving, of which our text is a part. It is probable that this psalm was designed as a part of the stated worship of the sanctuary, and hence these words afford a constant rule for the method of worship. “Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; bring an offering and come before him: worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”

Here are gathered several distinct topics, viz: the duty of public worship for the honour of the Most High, the acknowledgment of our dependence upon him by appropriate gifts and sacrifices, and, lastly, the circumstances and conditions which constitute a beautiful propriety in worship, called in the text—the beauty of holiness.

The duty of public worship we need not now discuss; the propriety of religious offerings we have already, in a former sermon, discussed. But as our subject in order to-day is “Holiness in Worship, or the Christian in the Church,” we will select the latter part of the text as denoting our theme—“Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”

And this language has a twofold interpretation, signifying, first, a local beauty in the holy place, as if it were said, “Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, in the beautiful place set apart for that purpose;” and, secondly, denoting the beauty of propriety in the form and expressions of worship.

First. A beauty is ascribed to the very place of our public devotions. I need but remind you of the high distinction which, under the Mosaic dispensation, was always awarded to the temple. It is, again and again, in the Scriptures, signalized as the grand, conspicuous centre of God’s



earthly glory. And taught thus by God himself, the pious Jew turned his face to Jerusalem whenever he turned his heart to heaven. It was a joy to enter its gates, a privilege to approach its altars, and an anticipation of heaven, faint and feeble indeed, to be near the enshrined presence of Jehovah in the Holy of Holies. Consistently with such legitimate feelings, the temple itself was constructed on a scale of magnificence which surpassed that of all human abodes. The outward form and beauty of the sacred structure were designed to image forth its spiritual glory, and to betoken the superior presence within.

That was a dispensation of forms and semblances, and has passed away. The time has come, according to the Saviour's words, when not only at Jerusalem, but everywhere, men may worship the Father, yet, with the change of dispensation, human nature is not changed, nor the relation of things. There is a natural feeling, which still prompts the pious heart to distinguish the place of public religious service, by signs which denote its holy separation and superiority.

And there is likewise a certain fitness of things which prescribes that the outward forms and arrangements of God's house should accord with, and represent, the sentiments of devotion. There is, no doubt, a typical connection between forms

and feelings. Signs suggest thoughts, not only from conventional usage, but from the nature of things. Hence the outward beauty of holiness in Divine worship, is to be sought by reference to this principle of our nature. I apprehend that to every mind, even the least cultivated, there seems to be a fitness in distinguishing a church from a warehouse. We do not love to see the same structure, which is associated in our minds with the purest and dearest of human hopes and sentiments—distinguished in no respect from the familiar places of our least sacred thoughts. We crown the church's roof with a spire, pointing like a finger to heaven; or we seclude it somewhat from the noise and commonness of the street, to signify its unworldliness; or if we do not so, there is a sort of instinct which tells us that we ought. This same principle may be carried out to a certain extent, with most salutary effect, in the general structure and arrangements of the church. The style of architecture may be one whose lines of form are unconsciously suggestive of elevation, and whose dim vaults and shadows shall promote the sense of being sequestered from the garish scenes of common life. Hence, there may be an architecture which is distinctively ecclesiastical, distinguishing a church from a civic hall, or a banquet room; and if it be

not carried so far as to withdraw the mind from this unconscious state, to dwell on the beauty of the workmanship, or the genius of the artist, human art may be made to subserve a high and noble usefulness.

The same is true of the arrangements and appendages of the church. They should indicate the peculiar character and uses of the building, awakening devotion without feeding superstition, and bringing no thoughts into the mind which are uncongenial with its characteristic sobriety. Many of our own churches have adopted, from our mother church, certain arrangements which are beautifully appropriate. In them, besides the communion table and the baptismal font, there are tablets inscribed with the decalogue, the creed, and the Lord's prayer, which, while they arrest the eye with important scripture, reveal the character of the place as sacred, and not worldly; and the character of the church, as a teaching, as well as a ritual church—Christian instead of Pagan; orthodox, not heretical.

But the decoration, as well as the architecture, of the church may be carried too far. Not only may the principle of symbolism be pushed to ridiculousness, but the best art may become absurdly out of place. The introduction of pictures into churches—a practice generally rebuked by

Protestant Christians as unedifying, is, in an artistic point of view, still more unprofitable. A picture can be seen to perfect advantage, only in one light, and from one position. No place can be more unfavourable therefore for such an exhibition than the walls of the church, exposed to a multitude of cross lights, flooding the picture with an unmeaning glare, and no position could be worse for observation, than that of a majority of the spectators, confined by pews to certain places; and who, if they observe at all, must be offended by distorted shapes, and confused colouring. Such experiments of incongruity only degrade the true dignity of art, and turn the sacred and the solemn into unworthy grotesque. Paintings and upholstery may be appropriate in the parlour, but are not the legitimate ornaments of that holy interior, where everything should conspire to urge home upon the soul the deep-laid, irresistible sentiment, "This is none other than the house of God: this is the gate of heaven." As a general rule, then, the fine arts should be subsidized for ecclesiastical purposes, only so far as they may tend to awaken, not the enthusiasm of poetry or of taste, but those deep fundamental impressions of religious truth, which remind us that we are in the presence of the unseen, but heart-searching God.

This principle is applicable, also, to another department of the fine arts, as connected with public worship. I mean the *music* of the sanctuary.

God has established so intimately this law of nature, that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," that it is impossible that music and devotion can be divorced. The melody which the heart makes in itself, strives and rushes to the utterance of the lips; and the sweet repose of the soul, in its rapt communion with God, is nursed by the solemn harmonies that come from without. Think of the transactions which are going on, day and night, around the throne of God; where the sea of uplifted countenances reflects the light of his countenance, and ten thousand times ten thousand tongues utter the volumed music, that bursts from as many adoring hearts. No scene on earth can so resemble this, as a whole congregation, lifted up on their feet, and joining in one chorus of musical worship. This is the only true conception of ecclesiastical music; and when this is realized in practice, one most important element is gained of the beauty of holiness.

In order to this, the melodies of the church should be simple; to bespeak those feelings of devotion which are among the simplest of the human breast. Its harmonies should be broad

and grand, to embrace the whole soul, and bear it strongly up. Its symphonies should be short and easy; its voluntaries, fitted to the character of the occasion, and the spirit of the sermon. There is no occasion in which human art should so studiously conceal itself, and become the secret ministrant of heaven, as in the music of religious pathos, penitence, and praise. When these requisites are met, the music of the church becomes what it ought to be—congregational—the music of the whole—beautiful to the ear, and to the soul.

But these requisites are too often scorned by the ambition of modern art. The taste that is bred at operas and concerts, soon learns to discredit the legitimate character of ecclesiastical compositions, and craves the higher excitements of music; its unusual harmonies, its minute beauties, its exquisite detail. It grows to love the art for its own sake; and to *admire* the performance, instead of feeling its design. When this occurs, the music becomes a mere exhibition; it is delegated, as a work, to a few; and the congregation are listeners, instead of worshippers. Here are two essential absurdities—substituting the means for the end, and making that which is beautiful in itself offensive by being out of its place. So far as this practice prevails, it per-

verts this beautiful part of sacred worship, and spoils it of all the beauty of holiness.

Having thus dwelt on the outward conditions and circumstances which aid the proprieties of public devotion, let us consider,

2dly, The connection of our own personal conduct with the beauty of holy worship.

When I say it is important how we should behave ourselves, as the apostle says, in the house of God, you will acquit me, I know, of any undue exalting of religious forms. Forms are not the spirit and the life; but they *represent* both. Our church, following the example of almost all Christian and Jewish worship, has provided that the several parts of her worship shall be conducted by stated forms; which, so far from being a hindrance to devotion, are, I am persuaded, most useful and effectual helps; and when rightly observed, conduce more than any looser methods to the holy beauty of public worship. For their full value to be realized, however, there are certain conditions, which I proceed to name.

The first of these is a due preparation of heart and mind. And this begins at home. When our eyes open on the holy day, our hearts should wake to holiness. The business of the house should be disposed of as noiselessly, and as early as possible; and the business of the week displaced

entirely, with its newspapers and letters. The family prayer being done, and the weekly offerings being made, as God hath prospered you, let the thoughts settle into soberness. Bring near to your minds the purposes of the day—what the Sabbath is, and why it is. With a prayer for God's companionship and blessing, that the duties of the day may be done as under his eye; its privileges enjoyed, as from his presence; its blessings secured for the coming week, and for all time and eternity too. With such preparation of mind, in a word, as you would make for an earthly court—watching, wishing, and earnest—direct your feet to the house of the Lord, and come before him.

And then, in the second place, as important to the propriety of holy worship, let me mention punctuality of attendance. The hour assigned for the commencement of Divine service was probably selected as the most generally convenient. It is therefore to be presumed that all may be present at the very opening of the service. And although to every one there may be sometimes a necessary delay, yet this cannot be *always* true of any one. Whenever, therefore, lateness at church is a habit, it betrays some fault in the individual, or the family, which may be mended by a change of system.



The importance of punctuality is obvious on several grounds. 1st. The early portions of our church service are, to say the least, as valuable as the latter, if not even more so, for they are meant to be a preparative for all that follows them. The opening sentences summon you, in God's name, to meet him. The exhortation defines the necessity and order of our duties. The general confession fits the heart, as nothing else can, for the joy and praise that succeed. All this is lost to one, who, hurrying in from the street, is obliged to seize the strain of worship just where he can. It can hardly be expected that his feelings can be duly attuned to any part of the sacred service, and his soul must suffer a want. When to this we add the reflection, that every late comer disturbs the devotions of others, as well as forfeits his own benefit, I think the propriety of this suggestion will need no other explanation. Better to be too early, than at all late. Better to be waiting on God, than to seem to demand that he should wait for us.

Again, thirdly, to maintain the beauty of holy worship, we should begin at the threshold of the Church. When we enter the sacred enclosure of Jehovah's recorded name and presence, each one should pursue his way to his place with a modest and thoughtful mien, not gazing abroad

on either side, nor occupied at all with other things. Let him first of all, by a few moments of secret prayer, establish a communication between his soul and God, and thus be ready to lend his part to the full-voiced worship of the congregation.

And, fourthly, when this is begun it should engross both the outward and the inward faculties. Our form of worship has this grand and beautiful peculiarity. It is meant for *common* prayer. Unlike the system in which the minister turns from the people, as if they had no interest or participation in his worship; and not less unlike that in which, by leaving all to the minister, the people may participate or not—our system contemplates both minister and people as joined and sharing in the duty and joy of open devotion. Ours, therefore, is responsive worship, and the plainest duty of the congregation is to join with voice as well as heart in swelling the tide of devotion that should flow over the whole. It is sometimes embarrassing to the minister who pauses for the response, to hear only a murmur, so faint and feeble that he can scarcely be sure that it has ceased for him to begin again. It is, however, still more ungrateful to his eyes, and must it not be so to the great Master of the assembly, to see, here and there, the open prayer-book all

unheeded; the Christian's eye wandering abroad through the congregation, noticing every entrance, and scanning the dress or the movements of others; and his lips closed against utterance, as if he had no heart to worship, or felt himself out of place, amidst forms that he rejected, if not superciliously despised? I am aware of the diffidence that is felt in responding by individuals who, hearing only their own voices, imagine that theirs are the only voices heard. But while this is not the fact to any considerable extent, it might be altogether obviated if every worshipper, mindful only of his own earnest part, would utter himself to God as if desiring that *he* should hear. This participation of each one in the common prayers and praises of the church, would beget an outspoken freedom, which would add not only to our enjoyment of public worship, but to the impression which our services are adapted to make, of admirable propriety and holy beauty. So that the stranger, instead of comparing us unfavourably with other congregations, for our want of spirit and earnestness—when he witnessed our ready and cordial worship—joining us all in every exercise—kneeling in prayer rather than sitting idly—standing in praise, as if the body would rise with the soul—and responding clearly with the voice in supplication and in song—would be

ready to fall down with us and worship God, and report that God is in us of a truth. For such power is there, the apostle being witness, in that worship which is in the beauty of holiness.

And now, in the last place, the worship is not closed with the liturgy. It receives an added and impressive beauty from the practice of pausing upon your knees after the benediction, each one invoking secretly for himself and others a blessing on the services of God's house. How ineffably better is this than the hurry and the rush which will scarcely wait for the last words of pastoral benediction, as if worship were a tediousness, and the relief could not be too soon! When, then, we see the congregation wrapped for a season in the silence of that secret prayer, as if God's mantle were thrown over them, and then passing soberly out to the well-suited music of the organ, not criticising the sermon nor retailing the news, but carrying in the whole mien the impression of having been in the august and loved presence of the King of kings—then we witness the sacred rule of worship realized in the beauty of holiness. It can scarcely fail that such worship would, by a hundred pleasant associations, entwine our hearts, and draw us often to the sanctuary. In the spirit of the Psalmist, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!

my soul hath a desire and longing to enter into the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." It would attach us more fondly to the idea of Christian fellowship and sympathy, and make us more like one household by making each one necessary to the others' enjoyment of the holy beauty of worship.

More might be said of our public services, but the limits of my discourse forbid it.

I recommend the subject to you, dear brethren, as worthy of your devout regard. There is an evident inconsistency in having a form of service which we systematically disregard. And when that form is adapted to the rich uses of the worshipping heart, there is reason to fear that to neglect the form, is to leave the heart barren.

I believe that our services embody all that can be required for a rational, affectionate, full-toned worship. If, by our practice, we would develop its capabilities, it would meet that demand, which, seeking after fervour and beauty, is sometimes led off after counterfeit ceremonials, and finds in dramatic forms the sentimental influence, which is but a lame substitute for the fervour of the heart.

Do not imagine that your piety will be more spiritual for neglecting its forms. So long as we have bodies, as well as souls; eyes, ears, and

tongues, as well as faith and feeling—so long should they be conjoined in the highest and holiest agencies of our being. We shall often find that the outward faculties will actuate the inward, as well as the inward vivify the outward. If God has joined them together for the perfecting of the beauty of holiness, let us not unscrupulously put them asunder.

## SERMON XIV.

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### THE CHRISTIAN IN HIS BUSINESS.

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Matthew vi. 24.

“YE CANNOT SERVE GOD AND MAMMON.”

EACH class of the human propensities and passions has, at some time or other, exercised over the lives of men a supreme control. Sometimes the dominion of one passion is so despotic as to be exclusive. It can bear no rival near the throne, and subdues all other feelings to itself. At other times the propensities will hold a *joint* sway, and reinforce each other. They will erect, in the breast of man, a sort of oligarchy of passions, dividing the moral empire of his being.

The natural desires of man, thus made sovereign, are like so many deities, to whom he pays the homage of his obedience. In the earlier times of idolatry, when it was customary to personify ideas and feelings, these governing passions were pictured in bodily forms, with appro-

priate titles. These were the idol gods of the heathen; and to worship them acceptably, was to indulge in excess those passions which they severally represented. Without attempting even a sketch of this idolatry, I may mention some of their principal deities, who, under changeable titles, have wielded the largest dominion over the generations of men, and may stand to us as the representatives of the most common passions of nature. Moloch is the deity of cruelty, ambition, and blood. Ashtaroth, the goddess of licentious pleasure. Belial, the patron of worldliness, as distinguished from a religious temper; and Mammon, the god of wealth, the miser's tyrant deity, and the especial tempter of every man of business, if not of every man and woman besides.

With this preface, we are at no loss to understand the words of our Lord in the text. The occasion, and the circumstances under which they were spoken, can be studied at your leisure. Their import is sufficiently simple, and the terms absolute and emphatic. "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon," is plainly equivalent to this, viz: You cannot be a true Christian, and at the same time be engrossed in the pursuit of riches. As our subject this morning is "the Christian in his business," I have trusted that these words of



our adorable Master might not be without their good effect.

In the first place, I remark, that neither our text, nor any other passage of Scripture, forbids the possession or the accumulation of wealth, in a right spirit, and by lawful means. I recollect but two instances which might seem to contradict this statement; but which are both entirely reconcilable with it. The first is the case of the young ruler, to whom our Saviour said, "Sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and come, follow me." But this was evidently meant to test the sincerity of his feelings, and to show him that Jesus Christ may sometimes require the willing relinquishment of the highest worldly advantages, when they come into competition with his service. While, for every such case, this instance is still legitimate, and full of meaning, I apprehend it would stretch its import too far to convert it into a universal rule.

The other instance is that of the primitive Christians, who sold their possessions, and "brought the money, and laid it at the Apostles' feet." But this was a voluntary gift; not required as a condition of discipleship, not even commended by the sacred writer, nor ever afterwards practised in the Church. It was a special deed for a special period, and as such may well

be repeated in the cruel emergency of want, to which the cause of Christ may be sometimes reduced.

That very striking and startling passage, in which our Saviour declares, "How hardly shall they that have riches, enter into the kingdom of God!" and, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God," is sufficiently explained by his following words, in reply to the anxious demand, "Who then can be saved?" "How hard is it for them that *trust* in riches, to enter into the kingdom of God!" and, "With men it is impossible, but with God all things are possible." It is a solemn caution against the dangers of wealth, but not the denouncement of riches as a sin. Had it been so, he would never have said that salvation was possible, on any terms, to a rich man, since God cannot receive a sinner to his favour without the total renouncement of that which constitutes his guilt; so that if wealth were a sin, he must become poor to be saved.

In accordance with this view are many passages of Scripture, which directly warrant the possession of riches. They are sometimes described as a special blessing from the Almighty, who "giveth us power to get wealth;" and the habit of industry is especially encouraged, on the

ground that "the hand of the diligent maketh rich." The consistency of Scriptural interpretations, therefore, requires us to suppose that the possession of wealth, however dangerous, is not necessarily sinful; and that the gains of honest industry and skill are a lawful object of human pursuit.

It is interesting to observe how aptly this conclusion harmonizes with all just reflection upon the nature of man, and the providence of God. The nature of man, by the Divine law which is impressed upon it, seeks a constant advancement. As his intelligence opens wider and wider, and his growing mind looks out beyond his first narrow condition, he discovers advantages which he has not; attainments not yet reached; conveniences that would relieve his toil, enhance his comfort, and minister to the wants of those who depend on him for support and security. The natural desire for improvement follows after this new intelligence, and he is impelled, from step to step of progress, by the very law of his being. And, corresponding to this natural impulse and power, God has opened up to his view a world teeming with the seeds of improvement; his providence by degrees unfolds the means by which this improvement is nursed, discloses the laws of the material

world, widens all the avenues of knowledge, multiplies the human race, strengthens the social feeling, increases each man's responsibility, drives him to enterprise and invention, rewards him with overflowing harvests; and each new generation stands on the shoulders of the last.

Now, one of the inevitable results of this system of the world, is an increase of all those advantages which constitute material wealth. And unless we are prepared to assert that God never meant man to establish his supremacy, as an intelligent being, over this lower creation; that this rich and bounteous earth was not meant to be explored, subdued, and cultivated; that the whole tissue of faculties, which invest him with a sort of divinity, was meant to be a shroud, rather than a robe of power; and that the universal pulse of life must stand still unless we debar civilization, we cannot exclude wealth. If the poor we shall always have with us, it is a part of the same divine decree, that there will always be the rich. So that both nature and revelation, God in the world and God in the Bible, confirm the conclusion that wealth is not, of necessity, a sin. The natural and necessary, and—I would it might be—anxious inquiry with you, is, When is the pursuit of wealth a sin? What mean the solemn words of Jesus Christ, "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon?"

Let us proceed, in the second place, to answer this question. The *dangers* of wealth, then, I apprehend to consist in our *servi*ng it. When we make it so important as to control us, then we become its slaves, and Mammon is our God. We may sin in the pursuit of wealth in two ways—first, when we pursue it with a wrong spirit; or, secondly, by wrong means.

We pursue it with a wrong spirit when we make it a distinct object of our ambition to be rich. God has not forbidden that every man should reserve a portion of his gains for the time of possible sickness, or infirmity, or old age. He has not forbidden that a parent should provide means for the comfort and education of his family when he is dead and gone. On the contrary, he has distinctly said, “He that provideth not”—*i.e.*, does not look out beforehand—“he that provideth not for his own, specially for them of his own household, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” But when this dutiful, domestic prudence becomes transformed into a passion for accumulation, the lawful instinct is changed to a lust, with all the debasing power of idolatry, and then is realized the full mischief denounced by the apostle with such terrible distinctness and such cumulative force—“They that *will* be rich, fall into temptation and a snare; and

into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." The wrong spirit which perverts wealth into sin, is the avaricious love or the covetous desire of money. Mark the expression—how truly it denotes the idolatry of the passion—"The love of *money* is the root of all evil."

And what is money? It is nothing in itself, but it represents other possessions. It is the mere sign of riches. I do not know that anything can resemble more truly the insanity of heathen idolatry, which bows down to a mere image, than that anxious devotion to wealth which gloats upon its gains, and takes a real satisfaction in counting the gold—which is, after all, only representative wealth. What can it be but idolatry?—and the idol itself is just as truly the work of man as any heathen god. For although nature has made wealth, man alone has created money. And while this very invention is one of the proofs of that peculiar intelligence which distinguishes him from the brutes—while it is a mark of somewhat advanced civilization, that he has learned to take the abstract idea of value, and embody it in an arbitrary form, which,

by its representative power, facilitates all the operations of commerce, and adds marvellously to the conveniences of social life—is it not strange that a mere representative figment should be to him as a deity, and that the whole circle of his passions and affections should be circumscribed within the rim of a dollar? Though Mammon may have changed his form, and lost his title, he is still a veritable idol, whom we have baptized with the name of *money*.

These remarks may seem to describe the character of a confirmed miser, whose only life and joy is in hoarding useless gold. Yet, though the miser may be the most exquisite specimen of this idolatrous character, his is only the same passion which may reign and rage in many a bosom besides. I have already said that the passions will sometimes hold a joint sway in the bosom, each strengthening the other, and two idols may divide the throne of the heart. It often happens that the love of mere worldly pleasure and selfish extravagance will co-exist with the passion for wealth. The extravagant pleasure makes money necessary. The one cannot be indulged without the co-operation of the other, and Mammon is served all the more devoutly in order that the heart may pay its oblations at the shrine of Belial. The serving of two false gods does not

diminish the guilt of serving one, and although wealth may be sought to purchase pleasure, the passion for money has still the debasing character of a lust. In the miser it may be avarice, but in the fashionable spendthrift it is covetousness, selfish still, and execrable by the laws of God.

Thus much may show how money-making may become a sin, from the spirit and motives with which it is pursued. I remark again, that it may become criminal from being pursued by wrong methods.

Every man has an unquestionable right to the price of his labour, his skill, or his commodities. All fair commercial intercourse, between man and man, is based on the exchange of values. My neighbour parts with his superfluities to supply my necessity; and I, on the other hand, bestow my spare commodities as the price of that supply. By this process each is the gainer; each contributes his share to the general comfort and well-being of the community. No matter what be the material of exchange—the fruits of the ground, or the fruits of the brain; mechanical, or artistical skill; labour, or literature; the doctor's prescription, or the lawyer's advice—whatever contributes to the physical, mental, or moral weal, is a fair material for traffic.

Such is the simple and only true basis of a



commerce which shall enrich the community, without wronging the individual. The only justifiable method of gaining wealth is one that shall be consistent with these fundamental principles; for, in all this, there is no violation of the great moral law of honesty and mutual love, between man and man. If sometimes an overflowing harvest should increase the riches of the farmer, while at the same time a storm or a fire shall impoverish the merchant; if there be a rise of prices for my neighbour's commodities, and no demand for mine—such inequalities of the market are under the direction of Divine Providence, and whatever gain there be to either party, it involves no wrong to the other. My loss is not from my neighbor's fault; the increase of his wealth is no sin.

But suppose that I, by my ingenuity or resources of any sort, can produce an artificial inequality in the market. Suppose that I can monopolize the whole of any commodity, indispensable for the common household use of the community, and thus, being the only vender, can demand my own price—it is plain that in this case I create for that one commodity a value that is purely artificial. I destroy the wholesome competition which regulates the balance of trade. Without adding to the value of the commodity,

I oblige every citizen to purchase at an arbitrary and unnatural price. I put myself in the place of Divine Providence, and I levy upon every purse a tax, which, though small in itself, is designed for the purpose of swelling my own wealth at the expense of the community, and for no other purpose; and so I violate the first principle of fair, and honourable, and religious traffic. I must be ranked then with him of whom the Holy Scriptures speak thus: "He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him." The principle abides the same, whether it be corn, or cotton, or stocks. The value is imaginary. I have done nothing that deserves remuneration. My aim is to become rich; not by benefitting my neighbour, but by injuring him—all my gain is made up of his loss. Such a method is either extortion, or fraud; and the motive that impels to it, can be nothing but unmitigated covetousness. Let who will defend or practise this method, the Christian cannot do it, and still hold the integrity of a conscience void of offence towards God and man.

My hearers, I had designed to follow out the application of this principle into other callings than that of the trafficker; since it may be shown that in every calling there may be methods of gaining wealth, which are not consistent with our Christian profession, or compatible with a Christian conscience.

But I must leave this to your reflections; while I conclude by reminding you, in the third place, of the danger and mischief of the service of Mammon. It is the chief danger of the times. Moloch has his reign in the periods of strife, and anarchy, and conquest. And Ashtaroth has with us no public altars; though she sometimes holds out her seductions, and inspires the feeling of her profligate worship at your theatres and your balls. But in the times of peace, of civilization, of commerce, Mammon and Belial may become the open and acknowledged deities—the one, of every counting room; the other, of every parlour. The love of money, to feed the love of fashionable pleasure, is our peculiar peril; and let us remember that it is an all-grasping passion. It is never contented with the gains in possession. It craves that other dollar. It has the fearful power of transmuting good motives to bad; and by its terrible enchantment, turns lawful means into unrighteous ends. When the pleasures for which money was hoarded have grown stale with age, the spirit of accumulation is strongest and fiercest, even to the brink of the grave. When the children are educated, and a competency for the family is safely invested, the lust for gold still grows on till its mammoth bulk crowds out every generous and holy feeling from

the heart. Many a time has the conscientious and noble economy of youth degenerated into the pitiful and ungodly avarice of old age. Many a time has the wealthy Christian exhibited the wretched spectacle of a benevolence, narrowing in the inverse proportion to his riches; until, at last, it was no wider than his grave.

To guard against this malignant and hellish bane of Mammon, God has planted an antidote in every regenerated breast, and a prescription on the Bible's open page. It is the principle of holy benevolence, which gains force by being acted out, and makes the Christian less in love with money, the more freely he dispenses it for others' good. This is the grand specific against avarice. If you would be saved from its guilt and its ruin, let each Christian devote his gains, even as he has devoted himself, in solemn consecration, to his redeeming God. Then, riches will have lost their power of cursing, and the unrighteous Mammon will purchase heavenly habitations.

## SERMON XV.

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### THE CHRISTIAN IN HIS AMUSEMENTS.

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2 Corinthians vi. 15.

“WHAT CONCORD HATH CHRIST WITH BELIAL?”

LAST Sunday, in considering the dangers which beset a Christian in his business, I remarked that the various classes of human passions, with their objects, are aptly represented in the Scriptures, under the images and titles of idol gods. The sanguinary passions are embodied in Moloch; the lustful, in Ashtaroth; the covetous, in Mammon; while those worldly affections which lead us to the pursuit of mere pleasure, and so beguile us from our better destiny, are all represented by Belial, the god of worldliness. It is he to whom the apostle refers in the text, “What concord hath Christ with Belial?”

In the verses foregoing and following the text, he speaks thus: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship

hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God." It is evident that he intended to draw a strict and strong line of separation between the servants of Christ, and the servants of the world. The very form of speech which he has chosen, renders the separation more emphatic. Every one of these questions is equivalent to a separate assertion of the impossibility of union between worldliness and godliness.

As we are to consider the Christian in his amusements, I have chosen the words, "What concord hath Christ with Belial?"

If we should undertake to answer this question historically, we might say, A very easy and frequent concord. But if we should answer it according to the essential character of the parties, we could not avoid saying, None whatever; they can have *no* concord. Christ and Belial stand to each other in the simple relation of antagonism; they are not merely *unlike*, but *repugnant*. The pleasures of time and sense are not at all like those of eternity and the soul: to be devoted to the one, is to deny and frustrate the other.

The phraseology of our text suggests this

thought, that there are two powers, each contending with the other for the supremacy of our hearts and lives; each, therefore, claiming the authority and dominion of a god. Each has erected in this world a kingdom. The one has gathered his subjects into a body designated by certain tokens, and known by the title of "the Church of Christ." The other has a host not less numerous, denoted by practices not less peculiar, and which may well bear the name that has been given to it by an able writer, of "*the Church of the World.*" The great question with the Christian is—how far, as a member of the former of these churches, he may, without sin, conform to the usages of the latter. It cannot be denied that it is a question of real gravity.

As it is always well, when we can, to determine particular questions by general principles, we can adjust the subject of amusements in no way, perhaps, so comprehensively as by comparing the characters and purposes of the Church of Christ, and the spirit and aims of the World's Church.

In the first place, then, the character of the Christian Church is specified in this phrase—"Ye are the temple of the living God." This language, though figurative, sufficiently denotes the high and peculiar vocation of the Christian. It

has a singularity that distinguishes it above all other types of character or modes of human conduct, and denotes that God dwells in his Church and acts through his Church.

The Christian's Lord has not left his religion to be conserved by the Christian as a mere individual. He has not trusted it to the chances of an individual life. He has given it a corporate character which never dies out. This Church was designed to effect by association what could not be so well accomplished by the separate endeavours of Christians. The duties of individual Christians are not merged by this union, but massed together in one accumulated responsibility which rests upon the church to the end of time. The great design of the Church then is to embody Christianity. It is a perpetual manifestation to the world of a system of truth which came down from heaven. It is like the monument on Bunker's Hill, not only a memorial of a great fact, but a witness to great principles; though how unspeakably exalted above all other monuments, since it tells of a world redeemed to freedom; and is built, not of mouldering granite, but of living stones, that will endure while the earth stands and be a memorial in eternity.

Looking at the Church then as a manifestation, we can understand why it was left to stand in



the midst of an opposing world. We can see why God does not snatch away his ransomed, so soon as they are born again, to dwell at once in the midst of their final reward. It was because he meant the whole sacramental host to be an impersonate Christianity; and bring it before men's eyes, and so to their hearts and consciences, rebuking their sins and showing them a more excellent way. To this end it was indispensable that the Church and the world should be commingled. Hence the Saviour, in his last intercession on earth for his Church, used these remarkable words, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil." To the same purport are the apostle's words to the Corinthians, "I wrote unto you, not to company with fornicators, yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, nor with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters, for then must ye needs go out of the world. But if any man that is called a brother"—*i.e.*, a fellow-Christian—"be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one, no not to eat." By this teaching, then, the Church is to be in the world, but not of the world; coming into contact with all its vices, but tainted by none; exposed to all the world's business and

pleasures; not abandoning it in selfish carelessness, but striving to convert it; and all the while keeping its own body pure, by salutary discipline, from all the guilty excesses and perversions to which both pleasure and business are liable. Righteousness can have no real fellowship and sympathy with unrighteousness, nor spiritual light with spiritual darkness, nor the temple of God with idols.

From the fact that the Church is a manifestation, we see again the mistake of those Christians who are contented to keep their religion shut up in their own bosoms, like a light hidden under a bushel. Satisfied with having, as they suppose, secured their own salvation, they mingle carelessly with life's perils, and indulge free intercourse with the world's worldlings, and manifest no holy care for lost souls, no sympathy for their sure doom of sorrow, nor ever raise the warning voice or lift a finger to save them from the wrath to come. Such persons have evidently forgotten the nature of the Christian calling as a manifestation. They forget that by the law of Christianity, as well as of nature, no man liveth to himself.

The fact that the Church is designed as a *perpetual* witness, contradicts the shallow, but very common notion, that the character of the world is changed, since the Bible was written.

Not to insist on the obvious thought, that if this be so, then the Scriptures are no true rule for Christian conduct; and that the civilized wisdom of the nineteenth century is better than the inspired teaching of the first, it may suffice to say, that since the Church, as an institution, was designed to be in perpetual contradiction to the world, it follows that the world is in just such perpetual contradiction to the Church; and if there be in the Church a real power and spirit of Christ, so in the world there is a veritable Belial, and these two can have no concord.

Knowing, then, the main intent of the Christian calling, we meet here the question, How far this calling is consistent with what are called amusements or pleasures of any sort, which have no direct bearing upon the salvation of the soul, or the conversion of the world. I do not scruple to say that they are entirely consistent. I do not suppose that the principles of piety were meant to subvert the laws of nature, or of the human constitution; since they are both the decrees of the same infinite wisdom and goodness. Regeneration overrules, but does not exterminate nature; any more than the new birth of the spirit proves that the Christian was never born of human parents. As conversion does not prevent hunger, and thirst, and fatigue, so it does

not forbid eating, drinking, and sleeping. By the very same law of nature, not contradicted by grace, the Christian must have his amusements. No man can live always at the top of his energies, without being overdone and crazed. Long excitement, whether of religion, labour, or pleasure, is followed by an inevitable collapse; and any measure of excitement demands a proportionate relaxation. If the bow-string be not sometimes loosed, the bow loses the vigour of its spring. The labours and duties of religion are to be accomplished by the same natural faculties which are employed in the ordinary business of life. The same hands distribute bread to the poor, and dispense the sacraments, as are employed with the pen or the hoe. The same feet carry the Christian on his errands of business and of mercy. The same tongue makes the bargain and the prayer. The same stock of nervous energy has to endure the wear and tear of effort, whether it be for our own families, or for God. Whatever be the employment, fatigue is its necessary consequence, and fatigue must have repose. Shall it be, then, the blank repose of idleness, of mere vacuity? or shall it be that better relief which engages, without taxing the faculties; which relaxes the high tension of body and mind, without evacuating either, which diverts

the excitement of the overworked powers, and so prevents congestion and disease?

Now, on physiological grounds, there can be no difficulty in deciding these questions. In all just theory, amusements are necessary. Diversions are a tonic to the animal life, and their legitimate use is as a *recreation*—a significant and a useful word. It follows then, that no particular diversions are, in theory, wrong. It would be both unphilosophical and unjust to the eternal majesty and worth of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, to concentrate its rebuke against an outward act, as if it were, in and of itself, absolutely a sin. Such a course would resolve the Gospel into a system of rules, instead of large and eternal principles; and change Christianity back into Judaism. Such a course would make piety to consist in mere restraint, and transform the evangelical graces into Romish penances, denying at the same time both nature and grace. In theory, the act of dancing is no more irreligious than any other muscular motion. In theory, the music of the opera is no more corrupting than the breathing melody of an æolian harp—God's music. In theory, a theatrical exhibition is no worse than any other imitation of human life and character. In theory, card playing is a mere interchange of certain figured

pieces of paper. It seems to belittle the Gospel of salvation to pronounce that these acts, merely as acts, are damning to the soul. And yet, I apprehend that most Christians would regard the Christian who practised them diligently, as giving no very worthy commentary on a religious profession. And I am sure that the world itself, the whole Church of Belial, would rejoice over such a Christian, and there would be joy among the angels of that Church, that a Christian had been born a third time, born back again into that last state of worldliness which is worse than the first.

If diversions are right then in theory,—when, how, and wherefore, do they become wrong in practice?

I presume an answer to this question, which would satisfy all parties, is this,—when diversions become worldly, they are unchristian. But as this answer supposes certain feelings and methods called worldly, it is natural to ask wherein worldliness consists. We can answer this question best, by considering what is meant by “the world,” for worldliness is the spirit of the world.

The world, then, in the religious sense, is not the great multitude of rich and poor, high and low, wise and simple, who make the aggregate of the human race; but it is that part of this

great multitude, who live supremely for the pleasures of this world alone. The Church of Christ, we have seen, lives for God and his joys. This is its peculiar vocation. The world's church has set its affections on things of this earth. This is its peculiar characteristic. In a simple and laborious state of society, there would be little need to warn the Christian Church against the idolatry of Belial, the god of worldly pleasures, because neither the condition nor the position of its members expose them to this danger. But in larger and older communities, there is always a class possessed of wealth and leisure; and who, from these advantages, exert a controlling influence on the manners, practices, and tastes of the community. They stand by themselves, and claim a certain superiority over others, and prescribe to them the rules of social intercourse. Removed from the necessity of labour and self-denial, they naturally seek excitement in variety of indulgences, and in the multiplying of luxuries. The pursuit of pleasure becomes thus the one great purpose of their life. As God's Church is united by the single aim of eternal glory, so this class are joined by this supreme purpose—the pursuit of pleasure as their final aim. This pervading sympathy constitutes the unity of the church of the world. This makes the baptismal

vow of Belial. Anything that contradicts this, is considered out of place in the circles of pleasure; and the discipline of fashionable life soon cuts off the offending member, and purges out the offence.

Now, in carrying out its supreme aim of pleasure, it is easy to perceive that this class of society must be driven to continually new expedients. The perpetual round of visits and operas, of dissipated gaieties of the city in the winter, and of watering places in the summer, constitutes the life of the circle; and then, to relieve the dull uniformity of excitement, there must be a revival in the church of the world; new modes of amusement must be introduced, and if these should chance to trench upon the bounds of a chaste and scrupulous propriety, either in dress or in attitude, the despotic decree of fashion sanctions the encroachment; and as the circle lives only for itself and pleasure, the novelty, though it be neither pure nor safe, escapes all penalty, becomes at once a precedent, and enters into the manners of the circle; and manners are only lesser morals.

Let this description suffice for the church of the world's elect. I should deem it no compliment to your understandings, to attempt to show that, with such a circle, the Church of Christ can



have no concord, either of purpose or of practice. Its foundation principle is in direct antagonism to that of the Christian life; and to be entirely devoted to its practices, would be equivalent to a renunciation of Christ's baptism. For this is the world, in the exquisite form of its worldliness. Amusements and pleasures, by whatever title, are sinful just in proportion as they are tinctured with this spirit, or approach to this systematic excess.

Now, although I have spoken only of the comparatively small class of the rich and high, who by no means constitute an important number in the Church of Christ; yet as there are successive grades in society, and as this class exercises a conceded supremacy, in dictating the canons of social intercourse, it happens that its influence reaches down to the other classes, who are most often found in the Christian Church. An ambition springs up among them, to imitate, not only the furniture, the equipage, and general expensiveness of fashionable life; but still more easily to ape its manners and its amusements. Thus is verified the adage, that one may as well be out of the world as out of fashion. It is then the bane has entered the Church. Seeking high things for their children, if not for themselves, Christian parents consent to amusements which

they once honestly renounced; and those amusements, harmless enough in theory, perhaps, become positively wrong and unchristian, because practised in the spirit of worldliness; or yielded, in spite of conscience, as a concession and a sacrifice to the world's god.

Here lies the radical sin—not in the act, but only as the act is an exponent of the motive and temper. The ambition is a sin, the violation of conscience is a sin, the undue parental indulgence is a twofold sin, because it is undue, and because it is wilfully exposing the young to temptations to which they are peculiarly susceptible, and whose indulgence is so perilous to the impressions of religion, that there can be none more so. It is from them that Belial gains most converts, by perverting their taste, degrading their ambition, sophisticating their feelings, and stifling their consciences. When we remember that the Church of Christ is to be enlarged from the young, if enlarged at all; that they are the only ones to take our places when we are gone—I am sure you will join with me in lamenting the too prevalent idolatry of Belial; unless I shall have failed to convince you that Belial and Christ can have no concord.

In this discourse, I have refrained from specifying any amusements as most liable to be hurt-

ful to the Christian. It is impossible to assign rules of general application. I have aimed only to set forth the essential principles of piety, by which our choice of pleasures should be regulated and controlled. The proper use of these principles would lead the Christian to avoid, 1st, those amusements which he finds, on trial, to dissipate his sober-mindedness, and unfit him for prayer; 2dly, those most likely to be abused by others, through our example; and 3dly, those which, being associated with the corrupt fashions of the world, have a bad repute.

If every Christian would bear steadfastly in mind, that the world and the Church are in mutual opposition, and that between Christ and Belial is no concord, he would have a godly jealousy of the pleasures of the world, and a touchstone always at hand, to test the tempting amusement. He would himself be shielded from the familiar reproach that is launched against the cause of Christ by the world, and from that fierce and scornful taunt, with which Satan sometimes wounds his pride of consistency; and that most terrible reproof of all, with which his injured Saviour looks upon him from his cross.

If these principles were acted out by the Church at large, what testimony would the Church give to the power of regeneration! In the world,

but not of it; sanctified in her faithful labours, and not unsanctified even in her pleasures; she would be bright with peculiar brightness. Even her enemies would own her as the temple of the living God, and Belial would not dream of any other concord with Christ, than that of total submission.

## SERMON XVI.

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THE CHRISTIAN IN HIS CHARITIES,  
OR  
THE RULE AND MEASURE OF ALMSGIVING

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1 Corinthians xvi. 2.

“UPON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK, LET EVERY ONE OF YOU  
LAY BY HIM IN STORE, AS GOD HATH PROSPERED HIM.”

THE support of feeble churches, by those which were stronger and richer, became an early duty of the Christian profession. Not many of the mighty or noble were called, for God had chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that were mighty, and to show the Divine superiority of moral force in achieving the victory of redemption. Still, as Christians were men, and had man's common wants—often aggravated by their sacrifice of worldly advantages—they became often dependent on each other for the support which the world refused to give.

This was specially true of those who gave themselves to the vocation of the Christian ministry, and whose labours, therefore, involved a separation from all common and secular pursuits. This providential poverty of the early church furnished an admirable opportunity for illustrating the grand characteristic of the gospel of Jesus—its large love; and for developing, into early ripeness, the affections of the regenerated heart. By this early history of Christianity, therefore, we are taught that benevolence is one of its prime and constant duties; and from its primitive examples we may learn how to practise the duty under difficulties.

In the text St. Paul instructs the Corinthians touching both the rule and the measure of their Christian almsgiving. “Now, concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. On the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him.” It would thus appear that the apostle adopted one rule for several churches; from which circumstance we may infer that he thought such a rule *generally* expedient. His object seems to have been, to establish not only a habit but a *system* of benevolent action, which should constitute a part of the church’s life.

Systematic benevolence, its rule and measure, is therefore the subject of the text.

To many of you the subject is not new. Several years ago I brought before you, in a pastoral letter, this great Christian duty and its sanctions. A plan was then adopted by a number of families among us, by which, on every Sunday, a collection was made of the offerings of each member, and a domestic treasury was established for the support of the various objects of Christian benevolence. The marked success of this plan, in the increase of your gifts of love and faith, was a sufficient voucher for its propriety. By degrees, however—perhaps from my neglect to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance—the plan seemed to fall out of use, and the subsequent action of this church, in this great department of Christian duty, has failed to illustrate truly either the abundance of your means, or, I trust, the earnestness of your piety. Let me ask you, then, to review some of the considerations which may be urged in favour of a definite system of beneficence, and of its rule and measure.

First, then, a *system* of beneficent action involves the same advantage which belongs to system in all other departments of a religious life. It enlists the mighty power of habit for a

salutary end. Prone, as human life is, to run on upon a level, each day repeating itself, with its wonted business, like the returning morning and night, man grows to be a creature of custom, or, as it has been said, a bundle of habits. Everything without, as well as within him, tends to constancy. Excitements, moods of enthusiasm, passionate extasies, are rare and extraordinary. Disturbed nature loves to return to her old laws, and habit soon asserts its claim of prescription. In such a state of things religion can never maintain its power, unless it conform to the nature of man and of the universe. Religion itself must be a habit. It must enter in among the businesses of life—itsself the chief business. It must not merely press down the nature of man by its occasional vehemence, as the hurricane bows the forest tree, but it must live in the cares and pleasures of life—a daily influence—like the gale, when its fury is changed into the steady summer breeze, pressing both stem and branches in one permanent bias, and making music among the dancing leaves.

The Christian, who, refusing a system of piety, leaves his religious duties to be regulated by his impulses and feelings, is sure to suffer from barrenness of soul. Unless his private devotions be a matter of systematic habit, he is in danger that



his devotion will be quite rooted out. He who allows himself to abstain from the house of God, for a part of the Sabbath, or on the week-day, will find inevitably that neglect grows easier with every week. And to meet the depraving tendencies of habit of one sort, he must establish a practice of a different sort, sanctified, and, above all, steady.

Now this self-policy is no less indispensable in our charities, than in our devotions. They should be habitual, business like; and arranged, if I may say so, on a certain principle of mechanism.

I do not indeed believe with some, that our religious gifts are to be regulated exclusively on a principle of mere form, and of cool, conscientious system; that they are never to be prompted by awakened feeling, occasional sympathy, and extraordinary appeal. On the contrary, I suppose that religion, though a Divine principle, was planted in human nature to be humanised; not to stand stark and solitary in the breast, separated from the natural feelings, and sequestered from all that the heart naturally loves. The sensibilities are not to be tortured and crucified, but ruled and sanctified, by the presence and power of a heavenly element. The Divine life, though, like our ordinary, it should be habitual,

is just as much exposed to occasional influences, that waken it to unwonted activity. The walk must, on emergency, sometimes be quickened to a run; the easy exercise, to a vehement struggle; the heart's unfelt pulse, to a throbbing that shall seem almost to burst the bosom; and the calm respiration of the chest, to the convulsive heaving which gathers all the strength into a moment of effort. And if this is sometimes necessary in our animal life, so it is in our mental, and not less in our spiritual and religious. Our common prayers may sometimes be deepened by a *rapture* of devotion; our settled love of Jesus, exalted even to extasy; our Christian hope may rise out of its calm seat of meditation, and soar to seize its prize.

Accordingly, our benevolence may sometimes be excited out of its calm mood as a principle, into an enthusiasm, as of passion. Some unusual distress of Christ's cause, some new picture of sorrow, some emergent need in any of the enterprises of benevolence, may stir the Christian to the extraordinary effort with which he might rush to snatch a friend from the flames of his dwelling. Yet while this occasional excitement is allowable, and not unhealthful, in religion and in life, it can never become ordinary and constant. A man should no more trust to such moods for

the maintenance of his piety, than wait and depend on conflagrations for his bodily exercise.

Having said thus much on the principle of system in our beneficence, let us see the working of the principle under the operation of the apostle's *rule*. "Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store." The rule then, is a periodical, a weekly, a Sabbath gift.

Periodical beneficence has several advantages peculiar to itself. The foremost of these, perhaps, is that it seems to bring the Christian giver more immediately into the presence, and under the eye of God. As he deposits his offering of duty in the place consecrated for holy gifts, privately, away from the observation of all others, he may be naturally led to reflect upon the purpose of the contribution, the reasons for the duty, and all the associated thoughts that come in with these. Perhaps his offering is small, and he may well be reminded of the huge debt he owes to redeeming love, and a protecting providence. He reflects upon the overwhelming need of that world of sin and sorrow, for which his alms are designed. He scans the methods of grace, reviews the promises, forecasts eternity, searches his own heart, invokes the omnipotent blessing upon the deed of love, which, though it may be to the utmost of his means, he feels is far from commensurate with the mighty exigencies of a ruined world.

Whatever be the periods he assigns to himself for these gifts of charity, the very act of deliberately separating a portion of his wealth for a sacred use, brings his mind into contact with such impressions as these; and it is impossible that he should not be, for the time, more spiritually minded, world-forgetting and devout. He will form true judgments of life and its purposes, and will have imposed a check upon the wantonness of those feelings of avarice, which thwart so habitually the impulses of Christian kindness.

Moreover, this private, periodical beneficence, begets the *habit* of charity, more than such gifts as are bestowed under the excitement of public appeal; because they are made at a time when the heart and mind are in a state more like that of ordinary life. A deed, done under unusual excitement, may engender a disposition to do that same deed again under the same excitement. But the habit that grows from such deeds, will be only the habit of acting under excitement. Its influence will terminate with the occasion; and when the flush of feeling shall have spent itself, nature falls into collapse, and must sleep, in order to recruit. This will never do for a Christian. His cool, every-day life, is made up by habits; and if his religion is to be for every day, his habits must be formed in those moods of mind in which he will usually be called to act.

Another advantage of this method of charity is, that the motive will be purer, and the gift more acceptable to God. A religious gift is neither greater nor less, except as God will own and bless it. It may be a gift of many dollars, or of a single dime. The larger contribution will bring no good to giver or receiver, if God blow upon it, in scorn of the motive. The lesser gift will redound to the greater grace of the donor, the benefit of the receiver, and the glory of God, if, from a loving, humble heart, that gift goes forth with faith and prayer. Let us remember that the coin which we cast into the Lord's treasury, is weighed in scales not adjusted to our standard. In the balances of the sanctuary, spirit has weight, and a grain of grace is heavier than pounds of gold.

Now, when we make our contributions in public, or under the eyes of men, we often give from ostentation, like Pharisees; we often give from fear of shame; often from the stress of conscience, and its rod; often from mere natural generosity; and, in either case, we give without that cordial regard for Christ and his cause, that humble love, that deems it a blessing to give; in which alone the grace of charity consists. This dangerous liability is obviated by the method of private, deliberate, periodical contribution.

I may add to these considerations another,

viz: that a system of periodical charity will secure, for the cause of benevolence, both more donors and more donations.

It will secure more donors, because there are some, in every church, who feel that the little which they can give of their poverty, is hardly worthy to be publicly offered; and rather than *appear* to give so little as they must, they may decline to bestow even what they can. These smaller benefactions, when made periodically, easily swell from small to great, and soon become of magnitude enough to be thought not unworthy of the altar of the sanctuary.

And besides the increased number of donors, there will be a multiplication of gifts. If you have no other system of charity, than the public and occasional one of the church, you will feel called upon to give, only when you are here to be asked. Your absence, on that occasion, would then be a loss to the cause, and to your own spiritual welfare. A year might pass without bearing its fruits of love from you to God; because you depended on the occasion of charity offered you by the minister, rather than on the system adopted for yourself.

But I pass to consider the remainder of the apostle's rule, which I must do very briefly. The gifts are to be not only periodical, but at short

periods; weekly, as God hath prospered you during the week. I am well aware, that with our present methods of business it would be quite impracticable, for most of you, to determine how much a week's prosperity would be. Then let the best approximation to an estimate be made *weekly*. Keep up, at least, to the *spirit* of the rule, and give something, in faith; and when the account *is* taken of your profits, if it be only once a year, you will be ready to compensate, if need be, the deficiencies of the fifty-two weekly offerings.

Let it be on the first day of the week; a Sabbath offering, because it is a Sabbath deed, and there is none more worthy of the sacred day. When the shop is shut, and the exchange is still, and the tongue of the chafferer is tuning itself to other strains; when the admonishing bell rings out its jubilate, and all things signalize the day, of all others, far the best; let your first Sabbath deed, after consecrating the day to God and your soul, be an humble, grateful, prayerful gift to your adorable Redeemer. Let this be the Sabbath rule of your household, of all your households; and I say, not simply that the treasury of the Lord may be filled from your open hearts and hands, but that the bounty of your covenant God would overflow, to the huge

increase of your spiritual wealth; for he would open the windows of heaven, and pour out a blessing, that there should not be room enough to receive it.

Such is the system and rule of Christian beneficence. Its measure—"As God hath prospered you"—is a large measure to some, but it is a measure for each and all. "As God hath prospered you"—prospered you in health, as well as in wealth; in your family, as well as in your business. Give him a return from each profitable venture, or bargain, or investment. Render him golden tribute for every special mercy, a thank-offering for your child's recovery from sickness; for your safe return from sea; for every demonstration of Providence, which has made you feel that a mighty arm was stretched out over you, and that you and your welfare were in the hand of a sovereign and most gracious God.



## SERMON XVII.

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### THE CHRISTIAN'S SATISFYING PORTION.

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Psalm xvii. 15.

“AS FOR ME, I WILL BEHOLD THY FACE IN RIGHTEOUSNESS:  
I SHALL BE SATISFIED WHEN I AWAKE WITH THY LIKENESS.”

THE seventeenth Psalm seems to have been composed during one of those seasons of affliction, which overcast the summer of king David's life; when, perhaps, fleeing from the angry presence of Saul, hunted like a partridge in the mountains, wearied and oppressed with life, he sat himself down in the shelter of some cliff, and sang forth his soul's longings to God.

In the perusal of this Psalm, it is very observable, that the hope of the holy man was contemplating something, not only better, but very different from anything the world bestows. It was not that he knew there were riches in store for him, greater than those of his enemies; nor was it an earthly distinction, that should overtop and

outshine the best honours of king Saul. He might have had *this* joy, had he but looked forward to the oncoming years of his life, when the outcast David should become the most exalted of Israel's favoured kings. But pomp, and pageantry, and regal state, were not the objects of his soul's coveting. The fervent spirit that moved him, was the same as we hear breathing in the sweet strain of another psalm—"My soul hath a desire, yea, even a longing, to enter into the courts of the Lord—my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." "Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they shall be always praising thee." It is most evident the Psalmist's desires were unearthly; not only because they pointed to a reward greater than the earth can yield, but because they were of a kind not born of the earth. It was a delight, as purely spiritual as any we can conceive, when he exclaimed, "I shall behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I wake up in thy likeness." I take this to be a very proper test of a renewed and converted mind, that it longs for spiritual prosperity, more than for all other joys. I can think of no characteristic so pure, and no proof of a man's piety so undeniable, as that which makes him desire to go to heaven, simply because God is there.

Since piety is the same in all ages, and since heaven is unchangeable, every true Christian will entertain the same desires as the Psalmist, and will aspire after the same objects. The mind that is renewed in the image of God, will take delight in nothing so much as in growing more and more like its Maker and Redeemer. And, therefore, I have chosen as our subject to-day, the Christian's satisfying portion—in the hope that our meditations on it may lead the steadfast to become more steadfast; the afflicted to find matter of high comfort and peace; the unsteady and double minded, to fasten their affections in heaven, as by an anchor; and the worldly, and unspiritual, and backsliding, if there be any such, to feel they are defrauding their souls; and to turn back after the blessedness they spoke of, when first they saw the Lord.

That we may reap such fruits, we pray to thee, O thou Holy Spirit of the Father, and Spirit of the Son, that thou wouldst touch our lips with fire from God, and make our hearts to burn within us, with the love of thee.

*The Christian's satisfying portion.* It is found with God; contemplating God; being assimilated to God. "I shall behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I wake up in thy likeness."

The text evidently suggests this order of remark: 1st. The vision of God—"I shall behold thy face." 2dly. Assimilation to God—"When I awake in thy likeness." 3dly. The satisfaction resulting from this state—"I shall be satisfied" with it.

1st. The vision of God. "I shall behold thy face in righteousness."

What is the vision of God? Is it a vision of the natural eye? Shall we gaze upon Deity as we gaze on the meridian sun? Is there a quality that enfolds its nature in such a way that we can survey, with our bodily faculties, the illustrious presence into which we are ushered? I think the question may be answered in the affirmative. We know that in heaven there will be the redemption of the whole man. We are assured that these mortal frames of ours shall, in the process of dying, lose nothing but their mortality; that they shall rise again, and ascend up to the skies, spiritual and undying, but bodies still; wearing the form of bodies, and endowed with all the faculties of human beings. If heaven be the home of the redeemed, it will be the home of their whole nature; and as the Scriptures describe the many visible forms of glory and beauty there—angels and archangels, and all the bright hierarchy of heaven; white robes, and a bright

throne—to be beheld in that resurrection state—may we not suppose that if these forms shall be present to the eye, much more will there be an exhibition of that presence which makes every thing in heaven beautiful; and without which, heaven would be only like a dark pit? If God is there, then—God, the head and substance of glory—will he not manifest himself in the effulgence of his uncreated light? Will not every eye instinctively turn to drink in the luxury of vision, and to gaze on the splendour of Jehovah manifested?

The renewed man shall look right upon God in his splendid manifestation, on what the Psalmist calls the face of God; and instead of being overwhelmed and blinded with insufferable splendour, shall find it yield a sensible and exquisite delight, such as the richest pleasure of vision cannot now approximate.

And I think this view of the matter is favoured by another consideration. Heaven is represented to us as the scene of the loftiest adoration and worship, and hence there must be found there all the facilities for the intensest devotion. We know how any affection of the soul is enlivened by the presence of its object. The calm flow of habitual love is often quickened to a rush, when the one who is beloved stands unexpectedly before us in

person. The admiration that was stirred by a poet's song, shall be immeasurably deepened when we go and stand in the midst of the scenes he has described. The laws of our impulses seem to require, that in order to the deepest emotion there must be not only a deep sensibility, but a sensible object. Now, when our human nature, with all its faculties woven about it like a tissue, is exalted up to heaven, will not the same principle hold good? Will not this law of our humanity be as valid and operative there as here? And in order that we may enjoy the best rapture of devotion, will it not be in a measure necessary that the object our souls adore shall be manifested to the natural eye; so that the entire humanity shall be engrossed, and the outward as well as the inward man, bestow its faculties, and find its delight, in the contemplation of God's glory?

What honour God has conferred on these corruptible bodies! What an exalted destiny for these frail faculties of sense! Now, they often vibrate painfully, as some rough event of life sweeps over them, like a rude hand trying the strings of a harp; and sometimes they are all unstrung by disease, as if the harp were dismantled, and its music gone; but in heaven they shall be braced again, and never fall out of tune. The body shall be fitted, by its regeneration, for

the pure delights of immortality. The eye shall never be tired of seeing, nor the ear of hearing the delicious things of God's abode. The faculties shall be constantly awake with lively sensibility, and the harp of thousand strings shall discourse of the glory of God forever more.

Yet this is, after all, the lowest view of heaven. Refined as our senses may be, they will be still subsidiary to the yet more refined soul. Must there not be in heaven the same correspondence and relation that now subsist between the spirit and body in every renewed man and woman? The soul shall always have the pre-eminence. The body shall be always its minister to serve it. I suppose that when the Psalmist speaks of beholding God's face, he has a higher meaning than this. Is there not a sense in which the soul itself shall behold God? Just as the eye will survey his natural glories—why may not the soul have a vision of its own, by which it will contemplate the intellectual and moral aspect of Jehovah.

This view will not be contested by any one who would disrelish the grossness of a Mahometan heaven, or the tameness of an arcadian Paradise. We know that the chief excellence of Jehovah must be, and is, something more and better than a material splendour. We might

guess that the Infinite Spirit would not be content with an outward brightness, when he had only to put forth the volitions of his moral nature to make the universe bow down before the ineffable splendour of the perfect Godhead.

And these conjectures are strikingly in accordance with the Divine revelation of himself. Jehovah evidently refers his primest glory to the moral attributes which clothe his nature. He speaks of himself in one passage of the Scriptures as "He is glorious in *holiness*;" and in another place, when Moses is said to have prayed that God would show him his glory, the prayer was granted, and the answer was, "I will cause all my *goodness* to pass before thee." And we find the apostle lost in admiration of the Divine glory, as it was disclosed in the *wisdom* of redemption. With the spirit of inspiration for our prompter, it is evident that the best glory of the Godhead is his moral and mental excellence; and when the Psalmist speaks of the face of God, we are to understand his words in the eminent sense of the immediate unveiling and display of God's spiritual nature, so that, as St. John says, "we shall see him as he is."

I feel, at this moment, that we are trenching upon ground that is not all our own. We are coming nigh the limits where human faculties



halt, and are obliged to confess themselves beggared and broken down. When we start the question, How shall the soul look upon the absolute and abstract qualities of God's moral nature?—how will our mental operations differ, when we come into the presence of the Almighty, from the manner of their exercise on earth?—we are obliged to confess that it cannot be described. If any of us had been *drilled* in this exercise of glory, he could not describe it so that it could be realized and understood by another, any more than the mole can understand why the eagle is not blinded when he soars into the sunlight.

Yet the subject is not without its instruction in this very respect. You have only to suppose your faculties dilated, and lifted up indefinitely; and you may then believe, at least, that it will be possible for the soul directly to contemplate God, as the source and fountain of all mental and moral excellence. We can see, too, that such a vision of the Godhead must be most ennobling. Here we are blessed with the revelations of him, which are only partial and fragmentary. God is in the universe, but we must travel over the universe to learn the extent to which his disclosures run. We find one attribute here, and yonder we track the footsteps of another. Now it is wisdom, then it is power, and again goodness,

and justice, and truth; and from these scattered workings of God we may combine a notion of his whole essential character, and learn that God has a path in this world in which he walks. But these, after all, are only the hidings of Deity. It is God we see, but it is a God who concealeth himself. Our present apprehension of him is just enough for proof—our whole knowledge is only deduced and inferential. We suppose what God is by seeing what God does.

But shall it be so in heaven? I understand a stronger meaning to be wrapped up in the expression, "Beholding God." It seems reasonable to suppose that the soul shall then, by an intuition, as if it had an eye, gaze right at the attributes of God, and not at the remote workings of those attributes. It shall look upon those attributes assembled, and not one by one; and, instead of admiring the scattered glory of God's particular dealings, shining like different stars; we shall stand before the concentrated splendour of his moral perfection, and not be overpowered nor dismayed. We shall not have to say, as we say now, of the Almighty, "This work is mighty," and "That plan is wise, and these dealings are right, and God's word is truth;" for it is not the separate acting out of these qualities; it is their repose which we shall see, when they are gathered together, as to their home in God.

We shall see the very truth itself, and righteousness itself, and eternal wisdom, and power, and love, in their perfect essence, and their combined splendour. Nay! we shall see *God*; i. e., not only these attributes of his excellency, but God, the substantial Deity; more full, more excellent, than the qualities which he puts on like a garment. Him shall we behold, Christians, if we are true to our calling. *Him*, who is the eternal substance of glory, and who makes all his attributes glorious, by uniting them to himself. We shall see him, if we make good our calling and election.

But it is time to proceed to the other topic, associated with this vision of God, viz: assimilation to him; being made in his likeness—"When I awake in thy likeness," says the Psalmist.

2dly. We are not, of course, to understand this expression absolutely, and in its widest meaning. To be in the likeness of God, cannot signify to be like him in his essential nature, or in his infinite attributes; for it may be very forcibly questioned, whether there could be two infinite beings, and not less reasonably, whether a creature could be made infinite by any power. There must be certain attributes of the Godhead which cannot be communicated to another; both because some attributes can be possessed by only one, and be-

cause, if bestowed, the nature of a created thing would not be capacious enough to hold them.

It is the peculiar madness of sin, however, that it aims at this very impossibility. The wickedness of the natural heart essentially consists in this, that it aspires to be like God, in supremacy, and wisdom, and power: aspires after those incommunicable attributes, which it were impossible for God to alienate, and only impious for the creature to desire. There is, however, an imitation and likeness of God which is both possible and most blessed. There are qualities of the Deity which may be communicated to his creatures, and which his creatures may receive; not in such a way as to make them infinite, but in such a way as to fill the largest measure of their nature with a most rich and happy grace.

We know, for example, that God may impart to the soul of his child a portion of his own benevolence; so that the regenerated man shall exhibit the gentleness, and tender-heartedness, and generosity, and self-sacrifice, of love unfeigned. And we know that the Almighty Giver may change the natural heart of sin, and fill it with such a love for righteousness; such purity of the moral sense; such a hatred of sin, even in the thought, that you might say, There is the image and likeness of God.

And this is always the case in regeneration, yet always in a limited degree. The likeness of the regenerate to God is, in this life, disfigured and obscure. There is, in a renewed soul, the longing after higher degrees of holiness, and a growing disgust with merely worldly enjoyments. Yet this feeling constantly labours against the inborn propensity to sin. Sometimes the carnal propensity conquers, and sometimes the upward tendency of his new nature. Many an agony does the child of God endure from this inward battle of the old and new natures. Many a groan of mental suffering has reached God's ears, when he has watched the strife of his beloved one wrestling with sin. How often have tears of piety gushed forth, because the heart had yielded so easily to the world, or the flesh, or the devil; and the cry of anguish and despondency broken out, when the Christian looked upon himself, "O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

In this life, then, we cannot say there is a perfect assimilation of the soul to God; but there will be a completed likeness in heaven. There, the tendencies of piety will be matured. The scars of sin upon the soul be obliterated, like vile defacements. Nothing that defileth shall

any longer cleave to the new creature; and as he walks forth in the streets of the New Jerusalem, the pearly gates, the shining robes of salvation, and the bright glory of God and the Lamb, shall be only the proper accompaniments of his state and condition, as a child of God, the living likeness of his Father.

But let me call to your notice the connection of this topic with the other just now discussed. The language of the text seems to imply, that the soul's likeness to God is somehow influenced by the vision of him; as if the sight of God had such a transforming power as to change the soul into his own image. After the same manner, the apostle expresses himself: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know, that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." The vision and the likeness are obviously connected, as cause and effect. God is beheld, the beholder becomes filled with God; just as the mirror sheds back the light, as if itself were light; just as the wax shows the true image of the seal; just as the man, who is familiar with fine models of character, and has discoursed much with noble sentiments, becomes himself noble-minded and upright; just so will the presence of Jehovah's

moral glory shine back from the Christian in heaven; just so will you see the stamp and impress of God upon his soul; so will his affections grow utterly pure, from this divine communion. His piety will fasten itself on God's own presence, and shall never waver any more, and his will shall fall in and flow on with the current of God's will, so that there shall be no discrimination; and you might say, the moral nature of that restored sinner is in the very likeness of God.

Blessed and glorious inheritance, where ye inherit the fulness and excellence of God! Holy and blessed family of Christ; actuated by one will, filled with one everlasting affection, bound forever to God, contemplating God, and more and more ravished with every pulse of life, because ye are growing more and more like the perfect and blissful Being whom ye serve! His purity makes you pure. His loveliness changes you to love. His blissfulness fills you with bliss; and ye know it must always be so, because God cannot die.

3dly. We were to speak of the *satisfaction* resulting from the vision and likeness of God, as our third topic.

“When I awake with thy likeness, I shall be satisfied.” I take this to be the very expression

that signifies a perfect bliss. If I were desired to point out the language that should denote a delight, totally different from any in this world, I should select this one word, "satisfaction." *Excitement* can be had from ten thousand sources, here on earth; *exhilaration* is not an uncommon state of feeling; a sort of *tumultuous rapture*, you may find in many scenes and passages of human life; but a perfect satisfaction and repose, you never found, nor heard of, beneath the skies. Times change, pleasures change, and we change; and there is no rest to the mind, and where there is no rest, there is no consciousness of enjoyment. The excitements of human life spring mainly from hope—the desire of something we have not; so that our whole career is a constant reaching forward for something to satisfy our craving. Uneasiness, then, is the great feature of the human condition; and who can say that uneasiness is bliss? You cannot suppose such a state of things in the presence of God. The joy of beholding God, and being in his likeness, is a present joy; a good already in possession; deep and large too, as the soul can contain. "Filled with the fulness of God," is the apostle's expression, most significant of a complete satisfaction. Whenever the mind shall put itself forth to know more of God, knowledge meets the de-



sire; and the knowledge of God is happiness. Whenever the soul shall be thrilled with the consciousness that it belongs to God, and is like God; that very exercise only gives a new fitness for heaven, for it is a new relish for holiness. And so you perceive how heaven may well be called a state of satisfaction; and how satisfaction may represent heaven, because the soul can ask no more. The supply is foremost of the demand. God fills the soul.

I just now spoke of some of the sorrows of a Christian; and I glance again at the subject, because it goes further to show why immortal glory may be called satisfaction. I spoke of the Christian struggling with sin and Satan; and Satan and sin assail him in a thousand forms. Sometimes when the child of God is drifting on the sea of troubles, and wave after wave rolls over him, till he is ready to sink, there will rise up in his mind the spirit of a rebellious complaining. He will turn up his eye to God, as if he would remonstrate against the discipline. "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me." "Is it thus thy children are treated? Wilt thou never stay thy hand, O God? Wilt thou crush thy worm to death?"

I say nothing in extenuation of such a state of feeling; but mention it only to say, that in

his exaltation to the presence of God, the Christian will see the reason of the dispensation; the perfect, resplendent righteousness of God's dealings. His blindness will be made light; of his discontent, he will be ashamed. He has seen God. He has been instructed in the Divine plans. He is charmed with the fitness of his own dark, bitter trials. He looks up, and with child-like gratitude and tenderness, exclaims, "I am satisfied."

And then, moreover, there are strange misgiving thoughts which the Christian has when God suffers his cause to be disgraced. Wicked sinners trample it into the dust. Wicked Christians are ashamed of Christ. The best devised plans for the Saviour's honour are all made vain; and the world seems fast sliding into the yoke of Satan forever. And there are not wanting moments then, when a doubt shows its horrid head, "Can there be a God that judgeth the earth? Is there a power in the universe that loves righteousness infinitely? Then where is it? Why does not the Governor, if there be one, stretch forth his right arm and avenge his injured name?" Heaven dissipates that doubt. You shall see the unfolding of this involved plan of Providence, and every page of the book shall be luminous with Divine wisdom. Ye shall see it when ye have

seen God, and are made like him. What ye know not now, ye shall know hereafter. "In patience, possess ye your souls, and then ye shall be satisfied."

I might travel through the detail of a Christian's doubts, fears, hopes, surmises, and trials, and show that they shall be scattered in heaven. I might touch upon the many subjects into which human curiosity, whether pious or criminal, has thrust itself; the permission of moral evil, the prosperity of the wicked, the casting down of the church. We are in a labyrinth of dark wonders here; we shall be in a vast plain of brightness and knowledge when we behold God, and "when we awake in his likeness, we shall be satisfied" with all he does.

But there is one mighty theme that now moves the deep curiosity of every soul whom Christ has washed with his saving blood, to which we ought to give a notice. It is a theme the world gives little heed to.

But the angels desire to look into it. It was a most profound deep to St. Paul, when he exclaimed, "Oh, the depths!" and we think the more we are like God, the more will the subject engage and captivate our minds. Must we say that theme is *Redemption*? We know something of Redemption now. We know its facts, but not all its principles and springs.

A Saviour died, we know, for an apostate world. He was God, miraculously incarnate. He lived and died, as the world says, most ignobly; but not in vain. He came on a wonderful errand. He discharged his mission wonderfully. The salvation he wrought out and finished is a wonderful salvation; and by means of it lost souls have been snatched from the brink of perdition, and made heirs of God. These are facts which we know; and we know the grand motive that projected the plan. Love, Divine love, Infinite tenderness and compassion for the guilty!

But there are things we do not know. The mode of the covenant relation between the Father and the Son; the extent to which the death of Christ affects other worlds than ours; but, above all, and what lifts up our souls with holy curiosity more than all, the nature and fulness of Divine love. Here is the deep of deeps. There will, no doubt, be exquisiteness of delight, in traversing the scheme of salvation, and discovering new adaptedness and fresh beauty in it, at every step. There will, no doubt, be amazing bliss in beholding unthought-of developments of redemption; as, perhaps, world after world sends up to heaven its new recruits of salvation, purchased by Christ's blood. There will be reverence and child-like joy in the display of holy

justice, and holy truth, in the salvation of the cross; but the ineffable feeling, the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory; the utter *satisfaction* of the soul, will doubtless be found in beholding the length, the breadth, the depth, the height, of God's love for sinners. Wherever we gaze, there will be love; for God himself is love.

We cannot measure it now, nor can we fathom it thoroughly then. But we can swim in that great ocean. We can dive down, and explore its depths. We can drink of its blessed waters. We shall be with it. We shall be in it. It shall be in us. We shall ourselves *be* it, all love; for we shall be in the likeness of God, and we shall be satisfied.

But now what need we say more, although you have not yet a tithe of the matter of this high discussion? Yet it is time we should close our discourse, with a word of admonition.

You see the importance and dignity of a soul. Some treat it as if it had little worth, and no immortality. They pamper the senses, but feed not the spirit. You perceive they are defrauding themselves of their immortality.

You see, again, the indispensableness of being born again, in order to see God in his kingdom. Yet you will find persons who would shudder, if they were obliged to behold him face to face;

and who crowd their life with all manner of occupation and pleasure, to shut the thoughts of him from their minds. They are as near eternity as you and I; and the next meal, or the next ride, or the next east wind, may bring them their death. Their present life is the seed of their eternal. They plant indifference, they will gather torment. They sow to the wind, and they will reap the whirlwind. But they care not for it; and if you urge them, by the satisfying glory of eternity, on the one hand, and by its miserable absence on the other, they will not heed you, nor turn out of their way to save their souls. Christians, you may weep for them. You may, and must pray for them; but they cannot go with you to enjoy God. You must part with them at the gates of glory.

And now, my dear Christian friends, are your hearts ready to behold God? Are your desires in heaven? Do you live a spiritual and heavenly life, walking with God? Oh! think often of your inheritance, and how you will spend your eternity. You are now in the gymnasium of heaven. As you improve your privileges, so will your glory be. You cannot deny Christ here, and enjoy him there. You cannot prefer the world now, and be satisfied with the likeness of God hereafter. The same heart you have on earth, you

will carry to your home. Keep it pure then from all filthiness of flesh and spirit; for only the pure in heart shall see God.

And if any of you are seeking consolation under trial, remember the vision of God. You shall be with him, and he shall wipe away your tears. You shall behold him, and understand why you are afflicted. You shall awake in his likeness, and be satisfied.

“Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

## SERMON XVIII.

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### LESSER TRIALS A PREPARATION FOR GREATER.

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Jeremiah xii. 5.

“IF THOU HAST RUN WITH THE FOOTMEN, AND THEY HAVE WEARIED THEE, THEN HOW CANST THOU CONTEND WITH HORSES? AND IF IN THE LAND OF PEACE, WHEREIN THOU TRUSTEDST, THEY WEARIED THEE, THEN HOW WILT THOU DO IN THE SWELLING OF JORDAN?”

IN the general decline of piety among his people, the Prophet utters his complaints to the ear of his God. But not rebelliously nor proudly. He prefaces his mournful expostulation with the profound acknowledgment of the perfect righteousness of Jehovah, and thus forefends the charge of presumption. He speaks as an inquirer; searching, as a pious inquirer may, into the mysteries of a moral government, and interrogating the dealings of Divine Providence, to learn their drift and meaning. “Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee, yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments.”



He then proceeds to ask why the wicked prosper, and how long the land shall mourn for their wickedness. Then follow the words of the text, which we may regard either as the reply of the Lord to the Prophet, or as the Prophet's own inspired demand of the wicked themselves: "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how wilt thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"

The imagery of the words is quite striking and characteristic. If in a trial of speed with *men*, your natural equals, you have been beaten, how will you contend with horses, your born superiors in fleetness? Or, if in the sunny and quiet times of Palestine, when the Jordan frolics along its channel, or eddies in its pebbly pools, and belts the whole land with its silver sheen; when the earth laughs with plenty, and the garniture of its summer beauty—if even then you have complained of hardships and tediousness, what will you do when that same Jordan, swollen with the mountain floods, shall chafe, and rush, and overflow, driving the wild beast from his covert, and whelming the harvest field with untimely flood, sweeping away your homes and desolating the land with a deluge? What will you do then?

The moral of this pictorial question is, If the lesser evils of life are too much for you, how will you cope with the greater? or, If you are not equal to meeting the dispensations of time, how can you bear the awards of eternity? If you cannot act among men as becomes a man, how can you meet your God? If you are troubled by the pains of conscience, and the disquiet of unforgiven sin, how can you confront the great heart-searching Judge upon his throne?

You see how broad is the scope of the general principle embodied in the text. We may apply it variously to several classes of persons usually found in a Sunday congregation, if not to the various moods of the same persons at different times.

Inasmuch as these words were first addressed to the Prophet on occasion of a general state of irreligion, so the Christian may accept them as adapted to himself.

No earnest-minded follower of Christ can look abroad upon the generation in which we live, without anxiety for the genuineness of the faith, and the prosperity of the cause of the Redeemer. He sees a wide-spread nominal Christianity. He sees the church gathering into itself persons from all the various classes of men. He sees the Christian name so honourable, that to refuse that

title to any man, is deemed almost an indignity. He finds that, whatever else may be thought of his Master, the once despised Nazarene is universally acknowledged to have been the most remarkable personage that ever trod the road of human life. He beholds the several bands, who call themselves Christians, engaged with surpassing energy in the various enterprises for propagating the faith, and doing good to men. And if he looked no further, he might take up his jubilate, and sing the triumph of the cross. But further he can hardly look without seeing a sight that arrests the premature thanksgiving on his lips, and sends back the current of his cooled blood to his heart again. For he sees labouring side by side with the church, labouring with equal energy, the hostile power of the world. That vehemence of zeal, which, at first sight, seemed a growth of pure grace, he discovers to be only a natural working out of human nature, in a certain stage of its civilization. The world is still the world, as much as when Christ proclaimed its essential antagonism to him; but with this great and ominous difference, that instead of meeting Christianity face to face, and rushing to an open onslaught, it travels the same road, under the shadow of the same red cross banner, and pretends a courteous alliance with

the saints of God. The world no longer calls itself the world. Infidelity no longer owns its baptismal name of Deism. Every form of heretical opinion claims to have extracted some principle from the Gospel, its purest and best principle, and made it its own vital element. Dame Morality borrows some of the most spiritual phrases of Christianity for its crutches. Philanthropy makes scorn of piety. The world's literature, professing the utmost purity of sentiment, insinuates the venom of unregenerate nature into the church; and, what is worse, the church's literature borrows the world's enticing forms, to make the truth as it is in Jesus more romantic and winning, and sequesters the Bible from the parlour, and hides it in the closet or the sick chamber. Expediency often supplants the simplicity of religious principle, and Christians are too apt to consider what will *tell*, rather than what is right and true. Even in the preaching of the Gospel, the most august of human responsibilities, looking beyond all other responsibilities, to the remotest issues, and the most solemn criticism of the judgment, the requirement seems often to be, not what the people need, but what they will like; not, Is it the truth of the living God? but, Is it the general sentiment of the congregation?

In such a state of things, it is not surprising

that Christians and worldlings should mingle and be confounded together. It is not strange that the halls of dissipation should echo with the frivolous voices of nominal Christians, and that religion should lose its manliness in the world; and on the other hand, it is not strange that the votaries of fashion and mammon should come, with their spirits reeking with the odour of worldliness, to the very altar of the Redeemer, as if their pollution could be so sanctified, and their worldly mindedness buy there an indulgence.

When an earnest-minded Christian beholds this view, he may well be smitten with a premonitory fear, what shall be the end of these things. Lord God, why is this? Now, if there were no other answer, there is this, discouraging as it may seem: "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how wilt thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan." It is as if God should say, You have not seen the worst, and if you are so disheartened at these early signs of defection, what will you do when the church is almost blotted out?

The Scriptures instruct us to look for a period, before the coming of Christ, when there shall be

a great falling away from the faith and purity of the Gospel. The mixing of the church with the world, will easily prepare it for an open apostasy. Whether this will come from the gradual extinction of piety in the church, till men shall wonder why they were baptized, and for consistency's sake will renounce a title to which they feel they have no claim; or whether martyr fires shall burn again, and dungeon tortures shall try men's faith, so that the church, effeminate and enervated, shall shrink from the trial, and curse the Nazarene rather than die for him—this we are not told. If history shall ever develope such an issue, is it too much to say that its elements are to be detected in the present state of the church? May not the adoption of the world by the church be the foul presage of its corruption? And may not the very energy and activity of the church, in what may be called the *business* of religion, be only one form of that power of will, which, unless it be tamed and softened by secret meditation on the infinite and searching communion with the God of our spirits, will degenerate into a mere self-will, the other name for pride, rebellion, and godlessness?

Be this as it may, Christian, your faith is not to stand in the signs of the times, but in the power of God. Feeble is the piety that cannot

survive unpopularity. Childish and cowardly is the spirit that must be reinforced by daily triumphs of the cross. The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full, said the Lord. Depravity has not yet developed its utmost capacity. Christ's victory is not yet practically achieved. His glory will not be full until the possible forms of wickedness shall be matured, and all the evil that can be shall stand up in embattled self-will. Then shall He, whose eyes are like fire, and his feet like fine brass, come forth and destroy them with the brightness of his coming, and let them know that verily there is a God that judgeth the earth.

Meanwhile, he sits above in the calm sufficiency of omnipotence, and though the nations rage, and iniquity come in like a flood, he holds the reins of the times, and drives back the surging wickedness, till its period is full. He can bear to see the corruption of his church. He looks forward along the line of that begun worldliness, which leads to the dreadful permitted apostasy, and to that terrible vindication which shall crown the faithful few with glory, and drive back his enemies with the blast of his mouth. Meanwhile, he can afford to wait; and, Christian, so should you. In your patience possess your soul. If in these minor iniquities of the times,

they weary thee; if in the land of comparative peace and quiet, and a popular Christianity, they weary thee; then look forward to the swelling of Jordan, and your faith will be driven to rest, where it ought, in the simple word of the living God; the best faith for all times, the only faith that can make you endure to the end, and bring you to a crown of life.

Secondly, We may consider our text as it is applicable again to the private trials of life. "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how wilt thou contend with horses? and if, in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" It is thus an admonition to fortitude in meeting the common ills that flesh is heir to.

Although no lot is without its own distinctive troubles, and no state of society is free from its peculiar embarrassments, yet these are borne with very various degrees of patience. So eminently true is the Scripture declaration, that man is born to trouble, that if his condition produces no troubles, his very nature and disposition will. In the necessities of poverty, the hardness of an emigrant life, and the general inferiority of an uncivilized state, we, of this century, think we can see reason for constant complaint. We shrink



from such an inclement life, a life of total hardship, in which the commonest conveniences are supplied only by substitute and shifts; and destitution, in its baldest shape, meets the adventurer, morning, midday, and night. Refinement and luxury bring all their gratifications for sense and soul, and empty into our laps the cornucopia of civilized enjoyment, till it would be quite difficult to say what higher grade there is for society to reach. And yet, in the inward life of men, in these different states of society, there may not be so much difference as appears. For, on the one hand, God, who tempers life to its various livers, has made hardship the natural mother of hardness. The very energy of emigration and adventure is exhilaration like that of joy; labour has its crown in achievement, and the bared nerves of life accommodate themselves with an additional coat of callousness, that defies the hardness of such a condition. Hope, that first attracted the enterprise, still fascinates the adventurer. Hope is his meat, and his pillow, and his shelter, making his night and day happy.

We, to whom, in the softness and refinement of life, such a lot would be a daily cruelty, have scarcely a single trial like his. Yet trouble is so legitimately human, that we borrow it, if it does not come. No palace door shuts out the inevita-

ble ills of reality, or of fancy. No cushioned luxury satiates desire, till it says, "I want no more." A zephyr will be a hardship to a life that has no hurricanes, and his spirit will quail to mere vexations, who might, under other circumstances, be strong enough to cope with solid, massive, manly trials. Thus it is that little griefs corrode us, when there are no great ones to buffet us; and we are wearied with running with footmen, overcome by troubles that spring out of ourselves, and our commonest life. How then shall we contend with horses, the real, grave, earnest trials, that come from a higher source, and put all our manhood to the test? If, in this land of peace, wherein you trust, they have wearied you, what will you do in the actual swelling forth of Jordan? It is a question worth considering. For life will be untrue to itself, if it do not bring to each one of us a measure of real sorrow, which it will require more, perhaps, than manly strength to meet.

Refinement, wealth, taste, and cultivated sentiment, confer no immunity from the dispensations of Almighty God. Domestic woes will supplant your domestic vexations, and mercantile disaster may put to shame your petulance at little mercantile inconveniences, and serious pains make you forget your fancied ailments; and

above all, the solemn necessities of your soul shall merge all remembrance of the artificial wants that now make your life's troubles. Yes, there will come a time when your heart, if you have one, will be torn with its bereaved love. That darkened chamber, where you watch by the bed of the dying, will be an apt picture of your darkened life, losing the light of your heart, and you will not know where to find consolation.

And that dying chamber will be, too, your own dying place; and, next to the grief for friends already lost, will be the grief that you are now going to leave the rest behind. Amid the faintness and irritability of your last sickness, your former troubles will seem how mean, and your vexation how unreasonable and shameful.

If you would think of these coming things now, how would it muffle your tongue against complaint, and subdue your feelings to bear the insignificant trials of your lot! What are these passing inconveniences to the solemn woe of that burial service, in which you must stand by the open grave, and see your dead husband, or wife, or child, or parent, laid out of your sight forever? What are these anxieties to that heart-absorption, with which you will watch for his

last breath—to that loneliness, with which you shall pace his desolated chamber, and your unconscious lips, speaking for your longing heart, shall call his name, and get no answer? This is a grief that must come. Every day brings it nearer the swelling of Jordan, when your heart shall be overwhelmed. What will you do then?

My hearers, you can easily see, by this example, how all your common troubles lose their weight by the side of this. If you would thus accustom yourselves to look to the sorrows that are real, you would have none that are factitious and fanciful; to those that are inevitable, you would avoid all the rest.

But you may reply, “What comfort is there in contemplating greater woes, in order to neutralize the lesser? I should but increase the amount of my present wretchedness by anticipating the future.” And this would be true, if you took only an unsatisfied and selfish view of them. But my hope would be, that the thought of such trials coming inevitably upon you, would produce the good effect of the trials themselves. It would lead you to resort for help and strength to Him who is the all-sufficient Helper. You might be led to cast your burden upon the Lord. You might go upon your bended knees, and implore the grace without which sorrow will either

crush or harden your heart. Nay, there would be more likelihood of succeeding in your prayer, than if you waited for the woe. For while you would feel your need of Divine sustaining grace, that feeling would have less of selfish distraction than if the sorrow were already crushing you. While the woe was yet distant, you would not be unmanned by fear; yet, at the same time, because it was inevitable, you would be impelled to a refuge in the bosom of God. Would to God that you, who are in the very central part of the land of peace and privilege, and yet find trials that chafe your spirits and mar your lot, would look forward to the swelling of Jordan, when sorrow's deluge shall flow over you! Then, if you have no interest in the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ, you will feel a want that has no mitigation. You will long for a relief that can be found only truly in the grace of a child of God. A false and fatal relief you may find in a hard heart. But seek that grace now, and it will enable you not only to triumph over your real griefs, but to despise your fictitious ones. That which will make your sorrows light, will make your vexations null.

Thirdly, But let us pass to consider another application of our text, to a different class of

troubles; in reference to which, we may still say, "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how wilt thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"

I refer now to the troubles that haunt the soul of an unconverted man. God has placed in every man's heart a great prophetic witness, to tell him of his sins, to pronounce upon his character, and foretell the great judgment. Conscience is God's viceroy over the realm of human spirit. Man may dethrone it by excessive guilt, and violate and dishonour it in ten thousand ways. But conscience was born to a throne in the human bosom, and a throne it will have, if not in this life, then in the next; in this life for his salvation, or, if not, then in the next, for his deathless torment. When conscience speaks, its voice is always kingly. Even though you chain it, you tremble at the majesty of its expostulation. It is God's eye. It sees your life, and reads your heart. It is God's voice, counselling your understanding. It is God's power, chastising your guilt with stings. Every sin you commit, open or secret, yea, every thought of sin, calls forth its indignant reprimand. You carry

it with you, my hearer, unless, indeed, I chance to speak to one rarely found in God's house, a reprobate. You carry it within you, and you are made to know it is within you, by most unmistakable signs. Go where you will, you have this inseparable companion and admonisher of your spirit, pointing always to the forsaken road of duty. In the church, conscience bars the point of God's truth, and fastens it in your heart. And even if you sleep upon the Divine message, conscience flies in your face when you awake. If you causelessly abstain from the services of God's house, conscience pricks you till you writhe. When you neglect your closet and its prayers, conscience complains through all the chambers of your graceless heart. Nay, my unconverted friend, I speak to your inmost experience, when I say, that in all your life of alienation from God, you carry this clog to your enjoyment—that yours is a life of sin.

You would be happy if you could not remember that you were guilty; but remembering this, oh! what a mockery of happiness is a life like yours. Rich you may be, in this life, but poverty-stricken for eternity; honoured in men's estimation, but miserably vile in His, who is no respecter of persons; wise in human lore, ruin-

ously blind in Divine things; just in your dealings with men, but defrauding the God who made you; free from all worldly stain, but guilty of the blood of your own soul. You feel it so often as you reflect. Your life's worst troubler is your Divine conscience. Your pang of pangs is your self-inflicted wound. Here is a trouble born of you and in you. You have raced with it, and you are distanced. In the self-complacency of your unconverted pride, you have a sorrow that you cannot withstand. "In the land of peace, wherein you trusted, you are wearied."

And now, let me ask the searching question of the text, "How will you contend with horses?" "What will you do in the swelling of Jordan?"

For there is coming a time when these pungent pains of your soul will seem like the brushing of an insect's wing, compared with the searchings of heart that you must then endure. The time is coming when your soul shall be laid bare to the eye of the whole world. Its character will be read aloud by Him who gave your conscience a part of His own power. He will expose your open and your secret sins, with all their aggravation, and bring your whole life to the dreadful ordeal of the Judgment. What wilt



thou say when He shall punish thee? In that ceasing of forbearance, and the swelling forth of justice and judgment, what wilt thou do? When the time for prayer is ended and gone, and the Holy Spirit of conversion has returned to God's bosom, never to visit you again, and the day of grace has had its night-fall, and retribution glooms before you through a starless eternity; when the wrath of the Lamb has taken the judgment seat, and the love of the Lamb turns away from you to the saved; oh! you who sometimes blush even in your privacy, to think of your guilty ingratitude to your Saviour, how can your hearts be strong then? How can you contend with your God? You cannot contend, for we know who will then call upon the rocks and hills to fall upon them, and shield them from His piercing eye, whose one look is a pang that never dies, and the waving of whose hand is the token of endless despair.

O my beloved friends, heed the admonishing pains of conscience now! You are wearied with them, I know, because you cannot deny their justice. As you love your own souls, and as you would fear to carry an unforgiven heart to your death-bed, and to the judgment, I beseech you to heal your present woe by providing for

the more terrible future. Assuage your conscience by saving your soul. To the cross, my dear friend, to the cross of your injured Saviour, and the blood that your sins drew forth from his wounds, shall be your peace in the swelling of Jordan.

THE END.

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